

E. 13432

THE LIFE OF
JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA • MADRAS
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO
DALLAS • ATLANTA • SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
OF CANADA, LIMITED
TORONTO

THE LIFE OF
JOSEPH
CHAMBERLAIN

BY
J. L. GARVIN

VOLUME TWO
1885 - 1895

DISRUPTION AND COMBAT

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1933

COPYRIGHT

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY R. & B. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH**

CONTENTS

BOOK VI (JUNE–DECEMBER 1885)

CHAPTER XXV

CROSS-ROADS: THE BREAK WITH PARNELL (JUNE–JULY 1885)	PAGE 3
--	-----------

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FALL OF DILKE: FRIENDSHIP AND TRAGEDY (JUNE 1885–AUGUST 1886)	31
--	----

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE “UNAUTHORISED PROGRAMME”— TRIUMPH AND ANTICIPATION (AUTUMN 1885)	55
--	----

CHAPTER XXVIII

SIGNS AND PORTENTS: AN ALL-CHANGING ELECTION (AUTUMN 1885)	86
---	----

CHAPTER XXIX

GLADSTONE’S THUNDERBOLT—A BREAKING-UP OF LIFE— THE RISK OF RUIN (DECEMBER 1885)	127
--	-----

BOOK VII (JANUARY–JULY 1886)

CHAPTER XXX

HOME RULE AND DISRUPTION—CHAMBERLAIN RESIGNS (1886)	159
---	-----

CHAPTER XXXI

	PAGE
"HIS LIFE IN HIS HANDS"—CHAMBERLAIN HOLDS BIRMINGHAM (1886)	198

CHAPTER XXXII

"KILLING THE BILL" (1886)	220
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FIGHT TO THE DEATH—THE BILL KILLED—THE GENERAL ELECTION AND GLADSTONE'S DOWNFALL (MAY-JULY 1886)	235
--	-----

BOOK VIII (1886-1889)

CHAPTER XXXIV

LORD RANDOLPH'S FALL—THE ROUND TABLE AND ITS COLLAPSE (JULY 1886-APRIL 1887)	263
---	-----

CHAPTER XXXV

TUMULT AND TRANSITION (1887)	297
--	-----

CHAPTER XXXVI

CHAMBERLAIN IN AMERICA—POLITICS AND ROMANCE (1887- 1888)	322
---	-----

CHAPTER XXXVII

ENGLAND AGAIN—A NEW MAN—MARRIAGE TO MISS ENDICOTT (1888-1889)	342
--	-----

BOOK IX (1885-1892)

CHAPTER XXXVIII

PARNELL'S RUIN: CHAMBERLAIN'S ASCENT (1885-1891)	377
--	-----

CONTENTS

vii

CHAPTER XXXIX

	PAGE
UNIONISM AND DEMOCRACY (1887-1892)	410

CHAPTER XL

THE NEW IMPERIALISM—"JOSEPH IN EGYPT"—CLEMENCEAU PROPOSES AN "ENTENTE CORDIALE" (1886-1891)	447
--	-----

CHAPTER XLI

QUESTIONS OF CHARACTER—THE CHARGES OF RECANTATION (1888-1891)	470
--	-----

CHAPTER XLII

LIFE AT HIGHBURY: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS (1889-1892)	493
--	-----

CHAPTER XLIII

THE TURN OF THE TIDE (1891)	505
---------------------------------------	-----

BOOK X (1892-1895)

CHAPTER XLIV

THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1892—GLADSTONE'S LAST GOVERNMENT (1892)	527
--	-----

CHAPTER XLV

THE SECOND HOME RULE BILL—AFTER SEVEN YEARS—THE ANTI-CLIMAX (1893)	554
---	-----

CHAPTER XLVI

CHAMBERLAIN AND GLADSTONE'S EXIT—THE LIBERAL EPI- LOGUE—"FILLING UP THEIR OWN CUP" (1894)	585
--	-----

CHAPTER XLVII

FALL OF THE ROSEBERRY GOVERNMENT—CHAMBERLAIN COLONIAL SECRETARY (1894-1895)	611
--	-----

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CALLING THEM HOME. From the cartoon by Sir John Tenniel reproduced in *Punch*, November 21, 1885 Face p. 124

CROSS-ROADS

S-l-sb-ry. "Hullo! Aren't you fellows going further with me?"

From the cartoon by Sir John Tenniel reproduced in *Punch*, July 31, 1886 ,, 264

"JOSEPH'S SWEETHEART." (A Fieldingesque fragment of a Tale of Love and Loyalty. Adapted to the situation)

Showing how our hero rejects with scorn the proffered title at the hands of Lady Tory Diplomacy and clings to the object of his first love, Dear Democracy

From the cartoon by Linley Sambourne reproduced in *Punch*, March 31, 1888 ,, 342

MARY C. ENDICOTT	} at the time of their marriage				
JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN		in 1888	.	.	,, 370

"HIS INFLUENCE ACCUMULATES THOUGH HIS PARTY DECAYS." Reproduced from Lucy's *A Diary of the Salisbury Parliament, 1886-1892* ,, 480

THE LIBRARY AT HIGHBURY. From a photograph taken in 1888 ,, 494

WINDING 'EM UP. Reproduced from the original
drawing by Sir John Tenniel for the cartoon
appearing in *Punch*, October 27, 1894 . . . Face p. 614

TAKING THE REINS. From the cartoon by Sir John
Tenniel reproduced in *Punch*, November 9, 1895 . . . 638

BOOK VI

JUNE-DECEMBER 1885

CHAPTER XXV

CROSS-ROADS: THE BREAK WITH PARNELL

(JUNE-JULY 1885)

“UNMUZZLED”—Radical Dreams and Plans—Dublin Castle denounced—The Projected Visit to Ireland—“The Cardinal Revokes”—Attacks in *United Ireland*—The Mirage of Conservative Home Rule—Parnell at Eltham—Chamberlain “Sold to the Tories”—National Councils dropped—Parnell’s Mechanics and the Margin of Error—Chamberlain as Antagonist.

I

WITH the fall of the Gladstone Government we issue from confusion. While some former and some newer motives remain secret, the more powerful impulses work out into the open, moving rapidly towards the Home Rule convulsion and the total transformation of affairs. At his risk Chamberlain undertakes what was then thought an advanced Irish campaign; and does this in full belief that he will be supported by Parnell. The speedy result between these two is irreparable rupture, months before Gladstone proclaimed Home Rule.

CHAP. XXV.
Æt. 48.

For the Board of Trade, Lord Salisbury selected the Duke of Richmond and Gordon—an appointment received by a commercial nation with amusement and respect.¹ A fortnight passed before the Radical leader, on handing over his old department to a patrician President, was formally released from office. During that interval he took little interest in the chaffering about supply delaying the Conservative accession. He only feared lest some unlucky hitch might force the Liberals to shuffle on. No one rejoiced more, or jested better, when the

¹ Soon the Duke became Secretary for Scotland, and was himself succeeded at the Board of Trade by Edward Stanhope.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

Conservatives were safely installed and his own emancipation was assured. From the moment of Mr. Gladstone's tendered resignation on June 9, 1885, the Radical leader acted like a free man.

For six weeks more before the power of their alliance collapsed seldom were seen more sanguine architects of castles in Spain than Chamberlain and Dilke. They have every reason to think that the edifices they design will be as solid as gleaming. The minority Ministry will be swept away after a brief, inglorious existence. The extension of a democratic suffrage to the counties, hitherto the surviving strongholds of aristocratic influence, will weaken for good the relative strength of Toryism and make the Whigs before long an extinct species. The next Parliament will be predominantly Radical; later Parliaments more Radical still. In the democratic interest the two aspirants resolve to demand a larger share of influence in connection with funds, patronage, candidates; and a more definite recognition of the Caucus by the Whigs. Chamberlain and Dilke do not mean to be fettered by the Whigs when the party returns triumphantly to office at the end of the year; nor ever again to make the same extent of compromise as during the last five years, so often seeming to them an eternity of disappointment.

II

Two specific questions dominated for the moment all other thoughts about Radical organisation and the Radical programme. What of future relations with Mr. Gladstone? What of the next step in Irish policy? Hartington they did not wish wantonly to drive to the other side, but he was no longer to be thought of as a Liberal Premier after his part in turning the scales in favour of coercion and against devolution. The Radicals resolved in the circumstances—though it was far from their ideal solution—to advocate with vigour Gladstone's continued leadership. That would be the ablest way of reducing Hartington and dishing the Whigs. It would enhance Liberal victory at the General Election. Prime Minister again for the last time, the historic man would remain but for a session or two. First, to carry the National Council policy not only for Ireland but

for all the four divisions of the United Kingdom—subordinate Home Rule all round. Second, to make a complete reconstruction of local government by creating for counties, districts, parishes, popular authorities, with new powers concerning land.

CHAP.
XXV.
Æt. 48.

Then Gladstone would retire, and the Radical duumvirs rule in his stead. Even before that consummation the allies would possess the substantial power in the first real Radical Parliament. Chamberlain as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Dilke as Foreign Secretary, whichever of them became Premier afterwards—this would signify not so much recognising the fittest as accepting the inevitable. In this June of 1885—destined to be the last full month of their dreams in the old way—they assumed that years of great achievement together would carry them into the beginning of the twentieth century far beyond Queen Victoria's reign.

And Ireland? What course could be clearer? Chamberlain especially has every hope, and every justification for it so far as he knows, of making the next few months decisive, both for Irish policy and for Radical triumph at the General Election. Absolutely he assumes that the National Council plan holds the field, and that there can be no substitute for it as a practical, manageable policy—sure to succeed at the coming polls and to come into speedy operation afterwards, if he receives from Parnell, Manning, and the Irish hierarchy that open support which his negotiations of the preceding six weeks have given him every reason to expect. Chamberlain proposes, with Dilke, to make an early visit to Ireland, equipped with friendly recommendations to the bishops, who will bring him into touch with the other leading men on the popular side. The allies will study conditions on the spot, gain fuller light on details, and knit friendly connections.

But the Radical leader did not dally pending this adventure. Before the Liberal Government was formally out of office, and to the discomfort of his Chief, Chamberlain began an open crusade against coercion and Dublin Castle and for drastic Irish reform. We shall now see how it came about that within a few weeks—simultaneously with the beginnings of Dilke's ruin—the bitter consequence was a final break with Parnell and the Irish party.

III

BOOK
VI.
1885.

Through these bright weeks of sinister import the inseparables emulate each other in ambition and affection. The following exchange of letters begins on the day after the Liberal fall on the Budget:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

June 10, 1885.—Dilke.—There is another condition which I forgot when I was talking to you and which is essential. We must be consulted in the selection of the Chief Whip to take Grosvenor's place. This means that a fair share of the party fund and of such patronage and honours as we may require shall go to our people in place of going to Whigs who stay away.

June 11, 1885.—Chamberlain.— . . . I agree as to the Whip. I hope we shall be very careful about amendments or we shall destroy the Tory Government before it has done our work. . . . Arrangements will be at once made for a great campaign in the country. As soon as Tories accept office a pronunciamiento will be issued. I shall give up the autumn to the business. . . .

Dilke's Diary.—Randolph Churchill sounded me to know if in the event of his taking office he could sit for Birmingham.¹

June 16, 1885.—Chamberlain.—If R. C. takes office *without* coercion we should not oppose him. If *with* I should certainly fight to accentuate the betrayal. Yes, gladly talk to you about manhood suffrage.

The same day they met to talk about the future of the franchise and agreed that votes for women, which Chamberlain rejected, was the only question of the future likely to split them if it became a main issue.² That contingency was remote.

Intent on immediate matters, Chamberlain next proposed a Radical junta to meet frequently for interchanging ideas and concerting action. At Chamberlain's wish Dilke took the chair, and Morley was included with Trevelyan and Lefevre. The junta then had five members, like the famous Cabal. Its chief result from the Radical leader's point of view was that in mid-summer, following interviews with Gladstone and Harcourt's intervention, Schnadhorst and the Caucus were to be recognised

¹ Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 147.

² *Ibid.*

by the Whigs and to work with them in closer connection. Chamberlain's natural object was to secure more financial support from the party funds for staunch Radical candidates of his own retinue. In this he was soon and sorely disappointed by the Liberal Chief Whip of the day, Lord Richard Grosvenor, whose Whig leanings were politely obstinate.

CHAP.
XXV.
ÆT. 48.

By far the best expression of the Radical leader's frame of mind after his escape into publicity when the Gladstone Government ceased is given in an intimate letter, not to Dilke or Morley, but to the editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, who had congratulated him upon his deliverance from office:

TO BUNCE

June 11, 1885.—MY DEAR BUNCE—It is delightful to me to receive your letter so entirely reflecting as it does the spirit of exultation in which I have accepted our recent defeat. The Tories have relieved us from a position of almost intolerable embarrassment.

It is probable that the differences in the Cabinet with regard to coercion would have been settled by compromise, but this result would have entailed most disagreeable consequences. Neither party would have secured a position which they could heartily defend. The Radicals would have been committed to some form of coercion, although they believed that it was both futile and injurious to the true interests of the country. It is quite possible that the Government proposals might have been defeated by a combination; and in that case we should have been beaten on a subject as to which hardly one of us would have had a clear conscience. . . .

I agree entirely with your view as to the time at which the Federation should pronounce. It should be after the acceptance of office by the Tories and not before.

If they give up the idea of coercion, as I expect they will, it will be a just punishment for the Whigs to find that they risked the unity of the Government and their own position and influence for the support of a party which will have deserted its colours at the first opportunity.

I doubt if there will be much use in our continued attendance in Parliament. Our duty will be transferred to the country and I am already contemplating a campaign to be opened in Scotland in favour of my proposals for local government and the settlement of the Irish question. Scotland will be a capital platform . . . as the feeling in favour of local

BOOK
VI.
1885.

government is very strong in the northern kingdom, and they will appreciate the arguments by which I shall justify its application to Scotland as well as to other portions of the United Kingdom.

I have also under consideration a visit to Ireland, as we intend to put local government and the pacification of Ireland first in our programme. When this question has been fairly opened I shall be free to take up the campaign in England, and I have already provisionally accepted a meeting at Hull where I will pay Mr. Norwood¹ out for his opposition to the Shipping Bill.

You see that I do not expect my time of freedom will be a time of inactivity; but we have arrived at a critical point, and upon the agitation of the next few months depends the future of Liberalism and the position in the party of our section of it.

Here we have the federal scheme known later as Home-Rule-All-Round.² In an independent view fifty years after it may appear as by far the best solution for England, Scotland, Wales and all-Ireland alike; for both islands and the Empire. The great autumn campaign, we see, is planned. We have the first incidental mention of an ardent idea that by perverse fatality marred everything and wrecked much—the projected visit to Ireland. Expecting Gladstone to lead further towards the Promised Land of organised democracy and even to cross the Jordan before bidding adieu, Chamberlain regarded himself as Joshua.

IV

Unmuzzled, his first public appearance was with Dilke at the Cobden Club dinner on June 13—two days after the Queen accepted Mr. Gladstone's resignation and called Lord Salisbury to Balmoral. The familiar scene was the banqueting-room of "The Ship" at Greenwich, overlooking the Thames. Rising amidst long shouts of enthusiasm and waving of handkerchiefs,

¹ Norwood, one of the members for Hull, was a Whig and ship-owner who had been a strong enemy of the Merchant Shipping Bill.

² In this Chamberlain believed himself at one with Gladstone, who had written to Hartington on May 30 urging the National Council plan: "I am deeply convinced that the measure

in itself will (especially if accompanied with similar measures elsewhere, *e.g.* in Scotland) be good for the country and the Empire. I do not say un-mixedly good, but with advantages enormously outweighing any drawbacks" (Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 198).

he rewarded the greeting. After a lively orthodox defence of free trade and a frank plea for "Home Rule"—as he so far conceived it—he trounced the Tories for their ignominy in seeking office by Parnell's support.¹ Then he coined for them the names that stuck—the "Stop-gap Government", the "Cabinet of Caretakers":

CHAP.
XXV.
Æt. 48.

I agree with Sir Charles Dilke in attributing the utmost importance to the question of local government in the future. . . . Experience justifies us in the hope that the reformed Parliament will do much in the direction of completing the work which previous reformed Parliaments have commenced. . . . We have to deal with obstruction in the House of Commons. We have to deal with the system under which the greatest legislative assemblage in the world has begun to lose its usefulness and in consequence lose its influence. And that result can never be accomplished so long as the Imperial Parliament is burthened with an ever-increasing amount of petty detail with which it is incompetent to deal. . . .

We also have to recognise and to satisfy the national sentiment, which is in itself a praiseworthy and patriotic and inspiring feeling, and which both in Scotland and Ireland has led to a demand for a local control of purely domestic affairs. And these objects can only be secured, I believe, by some great measure of devolution by which the Imperial Parliament shall maintain its supremacy and shall nevertheless relegate to subordinate authorities the control and administration of their local business. I look forward with confidence to the opportunity which will be afforded in the new Parliament for the consideration of this most momentous question, and I believe that in the successful accomplishment of its solution lies the only hope of the pacification of Ireland and of the maintenance of the strength and integrity of the Empire—which are in danger, which are gravely compromised, so long as an integral portion of Her Majesty's dominions can only be governed by exceptional legislation, and so long as it in consequence continues to be discontented and estranged. . . .

Lord Salisbury and the Tory party must lie on the bed they have made for themselves. . . . I look forward with interest to the spectacle which I believe will shortly be presented of a great party with indecent

¹ "Eating dirt" the late A. J. Balfour—long before he became Earl Balfour—called it twenty-five years afterwards in a conversation with the present writer at Cannes in the early spring of 1911.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

expedition hastening to divest itself of a whole wardrobe of pledges and professions which it has accumulated during the past few years, stripping off every rag of consistency, and standing up naked and not ashamed in order that it may squeeze itself into office. . . .

It is only upon these terms that what will be known to history as the "Stop-gap" Government can invite the toleration of its opponents. They must not undo our work. They must not jeopardise the results already accomplished. They must continue on the main lines of the policy that they have so often and so vehemently condemned. But if they are willing to do that, for my part I see no reason why they should not remain as caretakers on the premises until the new tenants are ready in November for a prolonged—and I hope permanent—occupation.

Four days later a more caustic satire became the talk of the country. In support of his brother Richard's candidature he addressed a meeting in West Islington. Holloway Hall, the largest in the district, was crowded to overflowing long before the time announced for beginning the proceedings. His performance sparkled with gibes upon Lord Randolph Churchill's subjugation of Lord Salisbury:

We now know who is master. Goliath hath succumbed to David, and Lord Randolph Churchill has his foot on Lord Salisbury's neck. . . . Although I have had occasionally some sharp passages of arms with Lord Randolph Churchill, yet I have never concealed the admiration I entertain for his ability and for his resource; and I like him all the better because the whole of his political baggage has been borrowed from the stores of Radical politicians. . . .

Let us take the question of coercion in Ireland. . . . Is Lord Randolph Churchill going to bow the knee to Lord Salisbury; or is Lord Salisbury going to pass under Lord Randolph Churchill's yoke, and to carry out in office the policy which, when in Opposition, he described as "feeble and futile quackery"? . . . But how are they going to pay their way? According to Sir Michael Hicks Beach, by raising a tax on tea. That is to say he will spare the beer barrel and tax the teapot. . . . Naturalists tell us that there is a kind of creature rather low down in the scale of animal life, which, when it is in any position of danger or difficulty, resorts to the extraordinary expedient of shedding its extremities. There is a kind of crab which casts off its claws, and I believe there is a lizard

which drops its tail. Gentlemen, these are the devices to which the Tory party is about to resort. . . .

CHAP.
XXV.
Æt. 48.

As he went on, the compact sentences were a fusillade. For the new democracy he demanded sweeping away of the slums and development of the soil by small owners. "You cannot produce too much food. The object of statesmen should be to increase the production of the land." And at the end he took his audience out of themselves by a thrilling appeal for Ireland. One ringing passage must be quoted. It sounded at that time above the opposing shouts and their echoes. He had spoken before of our "Irish Poland"; now he enlarged the comparison:

The pacification of Ireland at this moment depends, I believe, on the concession to Ireland of the right to govern itself in the matter of its purely domestic business. Is it not discreditable to us, that it is only by unconstitutional means that we are able to secure peace and order in one portion of Her Majesty's dominions? I do not believe the great majority of Englishmen have the slightest conception of the system under which this free nation attempts to rule the sister country. It is a system founded on the bayonets of 30,000 soldiers encamped permanently as in a hostile country. It is a system as completely centralised and bureaucratic as that with which Russia governs Poland or as that which prevailed in Venice under the Austrian rule. An Irishman at this moment cannot move a step—he cannot lift a finger—in any parochial, municipal or educational work—without being confronted with, interfered with, controlled, by an English official appointed by a foreign Government and without a shade or shadow of representative authority. I say that the time has come to reform altogether the absurd and irritating anachronism known as Dublin Castle. That is the work to which the new Parliament will be called.¹

In this famous effort the words were battles. The Holloway speech was an event on the Liberal side. Particularly was it marked by Gladstone, and in his pondering hours at that time may have given full impetus to his mind. Who knows? When both men were long dead the present writer found in Gladstone's collection of Chamberlain's letters, all scrupulously docketed and numbered from 1873 onwards, an

¹ Holloway, June 17, 1885.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

unexpected document. It is a manuscript copy in a secretary's hand of the above passage of the Holloway speech. Gladstone accompanies the first sentence by two marginal downstrokes of the pen; and the last words he not only signalises with two more downstrokes but underscores—"That is the work to which the new Parliament will be called". Another record shows the conflicting state of Gladstone's mind. He would seem to have been as much repelled by the implied attack on Lord Spencer's coercive regime as attracted by the Radical leader's insistence on Irish reform. He spoke in disapprobation to the Queen, and Her Majesty noted it, with additions, in her journal.

Windsor Castle, June 24, 1885.—Just before luncheon saw Mr. Gladstone who appeared very much excited but was very amiable. . . . He was greatly shocked at a dreadful speech of Mr. Chamberlain's attacking Lord Spencer, and hampering and speaking of the soldiers as "foreign bayonets". It is too bad and Mr. Gladstone deeply regrets it. He spoke of his plan of having land [? purchase] and central Local Government in Ireland and went "farther than Mr. Chamberlain".¹ I said I was surprised and hoped he would not agitate about it, to which he replied no, that if there should be any difference of opinion about it in the party, he should be silent. But he thought Mr. Chamberlain would carry his point, which seems to me doubtful. He disclaimed his opinion being actuated by any party-spirit.²

A moment significant of Gladstonian psychology in transition and of doubts still retarding impulse. But the irony of Chamberlain's own situation, through no fault of his in action or language, was about to become extreme. Once more he had gone far in advance of other Liberal leaders in running public hazards for Ireland. His intention was to clear the way for his Irish tour to clinch the plan of conciliation. When he spoke out at Holloway he expected, and well might, an enthusiastic Irish response. He had held out a generous and manly hand. The hand he thought would be clasped was bitten to the bone.

¹ Gladstone was prepared to give control of the police to a National Council, but was mistaken in thinking that in this he went further in principle than Chamberlain. O'Shea had

not asked in Parnell's name for control of the police. Chamberlain was ready to concede it if Parnell desired.

² *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Second Series, vol. iii. pp. 678-679.

V

The Radical leader's total alienation from the Irish party in advance of Gladstone's adoption of Home Rule has been the theme of profuse speculation, most of it hostile, all of it astray as to time and circumstance. Some general causes have been foreshadowed in foregoing chapters. How events precipitated a crisis fatal of its kind has not been known till now. Remember again that Chamberlain, taking O'Shea's apparent credentials at face-value and relying on Manning's further encouragement in the name of the Irish hierarchy, had never exchanged one direct word with Parnell either in speech or writing on the future of Irish policy. Neither had Dilke. Gladstone, with aged and penetrating astuteness, doubted their ground, for when he chose he could get into surer touch, directly or indirectly, with the Irish leader and Mrs. O'Shea.¹ The two Radicals were younger and less deep, and in this affair they were ingenuous as well as ambitious.

CHAP.
XXV.
ÆT. 48.

Immediately after the change of Government [notes Chamberlain²] I communicated with Parnell through O'Shea and enquired if he still adhered to his proposals. In that case, Dilke and I were ready to pledge ourselves not to join any Cabinet which would not make them part of its programme. We were also ready to speak in the country in favour of these proposals and to go to Ireland on a visit to study the question there with a view to further discussion.

O'Shea needed all his suppleness. In embarrassment he had his reputation as a plenipotentiary to maintain. He answered (June 11) cleverly:

My alarm is that Lord Salisbury may compromise with Churchill on a basis of No Coercion and Churchill Chief Secretary, with of course a seat in the Cabinet. Churchill is on such good terms with the Boys and could appeal so opportunely from Whig brutality to Tory trustfulness that he might succeed in Ireland at the present moment. If so, his party would

¹ We may recall words, already quoted, from Gladstone to Hartington: "I do not reckon with any confidence upon Manning or Parnell; I have never looked much in Irish matters at negotiation or the conciliation of leaders" (Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 197).

² Chamberlain's "Memorandum". He means after Gladstone's Government had resolved to resign and before the actual change of Government occurred.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

later on be tempted to support his appeal to the Celtic imagination of which he has often spoken. Of course the Irish Tories would hate it, but he has never concealed his opinion of them. Altogether he might dish us.

But by the next post or so the intermediary believes himself officially entitled to encourage the Hibernian excursion:

I shall call to-morrow about 10.30 lest there should be an early Cabinet Council, but if you are not ready I can wait. I wish to tell you all that Parnell said yesterday about your projected visit, etc. etc., which is too long to write at this hour.

For some weeks after this the luckless gamester of political intrigue brought nothing more tangible; but this seemed at first too like Parnell's ordinary habit of mysterious negligence to awaken suspicion.

Essentially an explorer and adventurer by temperament, the Radical leader was fired with zeal to see Ireland for himself. Dilke, when the joint tour was proposed to him, fell in whole-heartedly with the tragi-comedy:

Shall we get letters from Manning to the bishops? I should feel inclined to stay with them as men of Peace. I should be inclined to go to Cashel for Croke first of all. I should like to cross by Waterford, or else that you should go first and I join you when you've done Dublin, as I know Dublin thoroughly now and should be bored there (June 19).

To their indignant amazement Cardinal Manning, having led them on when he expected affairs to take another turn, now rebuffed their request for introductions. The prince of the Church preferred to deal rather with members of Governments than with men in Opposition. Forming new hopes as delusive as the former, he was already by way of recommending the new Conservative viceroy, Lord Carnarvon, to the benevolence of the Irish prelates (June 24).¹ He discarded the Radical ex-Ministers with polished dexterity: "What am I to do? I am afraid of your Midlothian in Ireland. How can I be godfather to Hengist and Horsa?"² The humour of this oracle is that Manning's interview with Carnarvon had taken place the day before! In vain Dilke answered that the joint tour was for investigation, not oratory:

¹ Shane Leslie, *Henry Edward Manning*, pp. 396-401.

² *Ibid.* p. 397.

We are not going to make a single speech or to attend any dinner, meeting or reception in any part of Ireland. Our journey is private. . . . It has sprung from your own suggestion and from my conversation held, also at your suggestion, with Dr. Walsh.¹

CHAP.
XXV.
Æt. 48.

Chamberlain had visited Archbishop's House in April at the invitation of His Eminence, and he now used short words to describe the Cardinal's desertion.

But was there not in Ireland itself a prelate more powerful—Dr. Walsh? Had they not been enlisted to make him Archbishop of Dublin? Had they not been induced by Manning to counterwork the efforts of Whitehall and Dublin Castle, pursued through the backstairs diplomacy of the Errington mission at the Vatican? Just then a baronetcy was conferred on Errington. What could be more offensive to Catholic feeling in Ireland than this item in the outgoing honours bestowed by the Liberal Ministry? What more prejudicial to the Radical ex-Ministers and their Irish tour? Dilke, in one of his heady fits of impulse at this phase, wrote vehemently to Gladstone and threatened to leave the Liberal Front Bench. Chamberlain promptly restrains him and persuades him to revoke. Their letters light up a curious moment in politics, when small things are the symbols of big issues. Their view of Gladstone differs only in shades of qualification. And what does Parnell mean? In his heart is he benevolent or malevolent towards the Radical enterprise? Chamberlain, the least suspicious of men by temperament, begins to wonder; and in his way, when awakened, will decide to clear it up.

TO DILKE

June 28.—Your indignation is natural—but you must not carry out your intention. You cannot split the party on such a question. Mr. G. has yielded to Lord G. (Granville) and has done an act unfair to us and without notice. It is exceedingly provoking, but the issue is not big enough to be “understood” of the people. I have seen O’S. I think the visit may yet be put all right. . . .

June 28.—Reflection confirms me in the opinion that Mr. Gladstone has not treated us well [over the Errington baronetcy]. I cannot resist

¹ Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 149.

BOOK

VI.

1885.

the conclusion that on both occasions he concealed his intentions, knowing that we disapproved of them, and in order to force our hands. . . . On the greatest issue between us and the Whigs, Mr. G. is on our side, and has told Harcourt that, if he stands at the General Election, he will make this a prominent feature in his platform and will adopt in principle our scheme of Local Government and devolution. This will immensely strengthen our position if we finally decide to press the matter.

I say "if" because I wait to have more positive assurances of Parnell's present attitude. If he throws us over, I do not believe that we can go further at present, but O'Shea remains confident that matters will come right. I shall hear from him to-morrow.

Just before, from Ireland itself, the ugly blow was struck at Chamberlain and Dilke—struck and redoubled.

VI

The hero of the Holloway speech had attacked the Castle system more fearlessly than any English statesman since the Union. He found himself assailed with savage insult by the newspaper supposed to be Parnell's own mouthpiece—*United Ireland*, a journal of boundless and sometimes electrifying ferocity in attack; of endless ingenuity in defying the "Muscovite" authorities. Repeatedly suppressed but insuppressible, it had more influence amongst the rank and file of the Nationalists than all the rest of their journals put together. In its issue of June 27 this redoubtable organ began the jeering articles warning off Chamberlain and Dilke. Their plan of sympathetic enquiry was denounced and travestied. They were treated as petty and cunning intriguers, whose real aim was to use Ireland as a cat's-paw in the interests of their Radical ambitions in Great Britain; who deserved to be ducked in a horse-pond or a bog-hole.¹ A roar of approving derision went up from the Nationalists in general.

No newspaper articles in these islands ever were more vivaciously stupid or more coarsely overdone. The object of "Parnell's organ" was to kill the visit which the uncrowned king was assumed by the Radicals to approve. For these extra-

¹ Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland*, p. 476.

ordinary outbursts there were several motives. Partly, they were inspired by indiscriminate vengeance upon British Liberalism for its five years of coercion, and especially for the "Red Earl's" iron-handed regime fought to the death by *United Ireland*. Partly, by cooler reasons. Parnell's plan was already fixed to support Conservatism now and at the General Election in order to equalise the British parties as far as might be and to place them both at the mercy of the Irish vote at Westminster—a design unsuspected as yet by the Radical leaders and clean contrary to their purpose. Again, and perhaps chiefly, the visit was particularly inconvenient at the moment to the new and fascinated Irish hope of encouraging Lord Carnarvon and Lord Randolph Churchill to outbid Liberalism in the Home Rule market.

CHAP.
XXV.
Æt. 48.

There was yet another and more personal reason. The articles in *United Ireland*, according to the frank confession of its editor, William O'Brien, were written or suggested by himself and by T. M. Healy, his close journalistic associate at the time. Both of them from the first had scented danger rather than promise in Chamberlain's letter to Duignan of Walsall seven months before. They both feared what Chamberlain believed—that the National Council policy, if countenanced, might become a real obstacle to full Nationalist Home Rule and might sow dissension in the Irish ranks. They had in mind the democratic leanings of Michael Davitt towards alliance with British Radicalism. But undoubtedly it was the main reckoning of Parnell's lieutenants that the visit of the two Radicals might interfere with the grand project—that of drawing on the Conservatives from dropping coercion to adopting Home Rule, while at the same time throwing the Irish vote in Great Britain against Liberalism and so enabling Parnell to command the House of Commons.

The objects are easily comprehended; but O'Brien and Healy little guessed the metal of the man whom they were repulsing without a word of thanks for his Holloway speech against the despotism of Dublin Castle or for anything else in his intrepid record on Irish policy. Parnell was not responsible for the language of the attacks. It seems none the less certain—the Radical allies having been used to draw on "the Tories"—that the Irish

BOOK
VI.
1885.

leader vetoed the projected Chamberlain-Dilke expedition in order to promote the immediate interests of the Churchill-Carnarvon regime and the further aims of his strategy.

Michael Davitt, for one, saw that a disaster was threatened. He knew and loved the British masses as Parnell did not; he felt that Conservatism by itself, whatever its momentary professions, never could carry the majority of the English people. He sympathised with extreme Radicalism; and he never forgot that Chamberlain had secured his release in 1882. He received in London the outrageous copy of *United Ireland*, and instantly wrote in repudiation.

DAVITT TO CHAMBERLAIN

London, Sunday, June 28.—The enclosed article from last Saturday's (yesterday's) *Dublin Nation*¹ represents the feeling of the Nationalist democracy of Ireland in reference to your and Sir C. Dilke's contemplated visit to Ireland. The attitude of *United Ireland* on the contrary, *does not* reflect the opinion of Irish Nationalists in this matter, and I am glad to learn since my arrival in London that *most* of Mr. Parnell's party in the House strongly condemn the article in the last issue of *United Ireland*. I deem it only fair to the democracy of Ireland that you should know this, knowing as I do the real state of feeling in Ireland on the matter and I think it my duty to communicate the fact to you, as I believe you are actuated with a sincere desire to learn the *whole truth* about the Castle system in order to effect its abolition.

Warmly responsive to these emphatic reassurances, Chamberlain was the more misled. He did not guess that Davitt had no authority to speak for Nationalist policy, and went on with his arrangements for touring Ireland. But where Parnell stood he was now determined to know. With this purpose he cut out a particularly abusive extract²—it was not the worst!—from

¹ *The Nation*—once legendary in Ireland but then entirely overshadowed by *United Ireland*—wrote with cool detachment. It deprecated placing premature trust in any English politician. "But it would be absolute folly on our part to treat them [Chamberlain and Dilke] with scorn and insult because they profess a desire to look into the grievances of which we complain and to make large

concessions to our demands. Again we say let them come and as soon as they please" (June 28, 1885).

² "The recent speeches of Mr. Chamberlain surpass in their cynical hypocrisy anything we have seen from even British statesmen. Base as we consider the conduct of Radical Ministers to have been in abetting the horrors which the Gladstone Government have carried out in Ireland, we never could

United Ireland, "Mr. Parnell's paper", and sent it on in this style: CHAP.
XXV.

MY DEAR O'SHEA—

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

—Yours very truly,

J. CHAMBERLAIN.

The alarmed Captain goes off to interview the uncrowned king, and then sends in pencil a hurried and unpromising account. Parnell, not approving the verbiage of the flamboyant rhodomontade, will not utter one public word of disavowal.

O'SHEA TO CHAMBERLAIN

June 28.—I have seen Mr. Parnell. He told me he attributed the article in *United Ireland* to his not having seen Mr. W. O'Brien before the latter's departure for the Continent—that the article was disapproved of by Messrs. Sexton, T. P. O'Connor and O'Kelly,—that there was internal evidence to show that it was not written by Mr. Healy.¹ But he went on to explain that he would do nothing to "break up" his party on the eve of a general election and the only hope he would hold out was that he would "do his best", and if he saw O'Brien, who would probably return soon, he would "talk the matter over" with him and that it might yet be put right. At the same time he acknowledged the difficulty caused by *United Ireland's* having already taken up its own position. Although I urged that for more than three years, you had worked loyally, always doing, or doing your best for, everything I asked you on his behalf, and although I laid particular stress on the many assurances of (in my opinion) a most binding nature which I had taken to you from him regarding the present business, he did not appear to be disposed to go any further. I cannot, however, doubt that on reflection he will see the necessity of altering a position of political and personal *cruelty* to you and myself. . . .

have supposed they would have stooped to the arts which they are now attempting to practise to curry favour once more with the Irish people. We plainly tell Messrs. Chamberlain and Dilke that if they are wise they will keep out of Ireland. We do not want them here. Let them stop at home and look after their own affairs. In plain English this proposed tour of enquiry is simply adding insult to injury. We regard it as a mere electoral

manœuvre. The truth is that so long as the House of Lords exists none but a Tory Government can pass an effective Home Rule scheme."

¹ Mr. William O'Brien wrote for the information of the present biographer (April 24, 1920) that the articles were "by Mr. Healy and myself". This statement is conclusive, and fully confirmed in Mr. O'Brien's subsequent book, *Evening Memories*, pp. 3-6, 88-89.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

Chamberlain must have read this with a darkening face. This is no longer the tone of an authorised emissary. O'Shea, squirming but not dodging now, is as candid as uncomfortable. Next day he protests to Chamberlain that all will come right. Before leaving for Madrid he continues:

Monday, 5 A.M. . . . Although my temper is that not of an angel but of an archangel, I made believe to lose it yesterday afternoon. Mr. Parnell sat under a tree for an hour and a half reflecting on all my observations, and although he would not confess everything, I cannot help thinking he must take steps to prevent *United Ireland* (with which he professes to have no contact except through O'Brien) continuing the course commenced in the last number. My advice is, do nothing, say nothing until my return from Madrid on Tuesday week. If eventually we should think it advisable to drop the idea of the journey, it can be done quietly and without announcement.

This is a rare picture of the ironic Parnell sitting under a tree—a world of withheld thoughts behind that still countenance. But none of this is good enough for Chamberlain. He means to strip the thing of ambiguity.

VII

When the Captain returns from his short trip to Spain and there have been no "steps" to help the Radical visit to Ireland, Chamberlain's patience is exhausted. Unlike the suave O'Shea's temper, Chamberlain's—though kept on the chain as a rule—is not quite that of "an archangel".

They meet in the House of Commons on Thursday, July 9. Chamberlain then writes a letter meant to bring Parnell to an issue. Without wasting a word it is very long, but as being of the most vital importance in this biography it must be given in full. He recapitulates the history of National Councils. He repeats his disbelief in extreme Home Rule of the kind soon to be proposed; but suggests that the limited scheme is good in itself, whatever controversy may subsequently arise about the larger. As to the vituperation of *United Ireland* he puts a poser. Does Parnell approve? Yes or no?

CHAMBERLAIN AND PARNELL

40 PRINCE'S GARDENS,

*Private.**July 11, 1885.*

MY DEAR O'SHEA—Referring to our conversation in the House of Commons on Thursday last I think it right to remind you of various communications that have passed between us previously and to ask you to show this letter to Mr. Parnell and to ascertain his views in reference to the points named.

CHAP.
XXV.
Æt. 49.

You are aware that I have always expressed the opinion that a solution of the Irish difficulty could only be found by a frank interchange of opinion with the leader of the National party, and relying as I have done on Mr. Parnell's honesty of purpose and sincerity, I have at all times been anxious to know his wishes and intentions and ready to give the fullest and most earnest consideration to them.

I have often expressed my conviction that the Irish people are entitled to the largest measure of self-government consistent with the continued integrity of the Empire, and I have urged upon you the importance of definite proposals for legislation with this object, which might secure the support of English and Scotch Liberals while at the same time fulfilling the just expectations of the majority of Irishmen.

With this object in view I ventured myself to sketch a scheme of County Boards and National Councils which I thought might be accepted as a settlement of this question. I did not suggest this arrangement as a substitute for Home Rule, as the demand for a separate Parliament, including an Irish House of Lords, and an Irish House of Commons, with the full powers of a Parliament in regard to every subject except foreign and colonial affairs and national defence, is one which may be treated independently of the question of local government.

I have not concealed my objections to such a proposal nor my opinion that it could not be accepted by the people of Great Britain, but on the other hand I have never attempted to obtain any pledge for its withdrawal.

A complete and effectual system of local government may be, and I hope would be, found sufficient to satisfy the Irish National sentiment and to relieve the irritation that now prevails, but if this should not be the case, no arrangement could possibly bind the Irish people not to pursue their demands any further.

Under these circumstances I was very glad to hear from you in January

BOOK
VI.
1885.

that Mr. Parnell had been carefully considering the subject and had authorised you to place in my hands a written scheme for Irish Local Government, which, although it differs from mine in important details, was based on similar principles. You informed me that Mr. Parnell had declared that the acceptance of his scheme in its main features would be in his opinion a settlement of the question and would lay the foundation for amicable and cordial relations between the two countries.

Speaking generally I could see nothing in his proposals to which Liberals ought to object and I believed that great advantages would result from its adoption both to Great Britain and to Ireland. I have therefore since that time omitted no opportunity to bring these proposals to the notice of my colleagues and to urge their acceptance as the basis of immediate legislation. I have found great support for them in many quarters, and I have been ready to make their inclusion as part of the programme of any Liberal Government an absolute condition of my retention of office in the past—and under present circumstances—of my acceptance of office in the future.

In pursuance of the same object I have, since the resignation of the late Government, called attention to the matter in public speeches, and I have arranged for an article published with my authority in the *Fortnightly Review* in which the main points of the proposals in question are explained and defended.

I have also arranged with Sir C. Dilke to visit Ireland at an early date and with the hope of gaining information which may enable us to urge with greater effect the prosecution of this scheme.

All these steps have been taken with your knowledge and concurrence, and have been, I believe, well known to Mr. Parnell.

I have, therefore, seen with astonishment and regret the bitter attacks (both on Sir Charles Dilke and myself—and also on the scheme for local government which has been suggested by us and which is identical with Mr. Parnell's own proposals), which have been made in his paper *United Ireland* and by some of his leading followers such as Mr. Deasy, M.P.

It is impossible that these attacks—which will greatly prejudice the favourable consideration of the proposals themselves—could be made unless the authors of them believed that they had Mr. Parnell's approval, and I think that Mr. Parnell is bound as a gentleman and a man of honour to take steps to correct the impression which appears to prevail among some of his supporters that he is hostile either to our visit or to the

scheme for local government which has been proposed on lines laid down by himself.

CHAP.
XXV.

Æt. 49.

I might stop here and leave the matter to Mr. Parnell to deal with as his own sense of fairness and straightforward dealing may suggest—but before concluding I wish to put before you some considerations of policy.

Is it or is it not desirable that some such scheme of local government for Ireland should be passed into law ? I think it is—in the interests of Ireland and the Irish people. Surely it must be the wish of all except the most extreme fanatics that the chronic agitation should cease and that the country shall have peace. If there still remain grievances to be redressed or reforms to be carried out it is eminently desirable that these should if possible be obtained by ordinary constitutional methods, and meanwhile Mr. Parnell will have been the instrument for conferring on his countrymen material advantages greater than have ever been contemplated by any previous leader.

If these arguments are granted I proceed to say that the chance of obtaining such results ought not lightly to be thrown away, and may not recur again in our time.

The Radical section of the Liberal party headed by Mr. Gladstone himself were never so much inclined to take a broad and generous view of their duty to Ireland. I believe firmly that the next election will in any case give a majority to the Liberal party independently of any Irish support, and if the offer now made on behalf of the English Radicals is rejected, I cannot see any light in the future or any prospect of the better relations between the two countries which I believe must be an object of desire to all friends of either.

I have written to you fully and frankly—I trust I may have an equally full and frank reply.—I am, yours very truly,

J. CHAMBERLAIN.

W. H. O'SHEA, Esq., M.P.

It was too late. In a way unknown to Chamberlain and perhaps to O'Shea, events already had moved too far on another tack. Secret negotiations for the celebrated interview between Parnell and the Conservative viceroy were already in train. Parnell had to evade the Radical leader and seem to palter. For him, in view of new prospects, the National Council scheme was a closed chapter. That plan, as he most prematurely supposed, was no longer desirable even as a half-way house. The intermediary had to send the following answer:

PARNELL AND CHAMBERLAIN

BOOK
VI.

1885.

July 13, 1885.—Yesterday I showed Mr. Parnell your letter of the 11th inst., and had a conversation with him on the whole subject.

With regard to *United Ireland* he again assured me that he interferes with it very seldom, and never except through the editor, Mr. W. O'Brien, M.P. The latter was abroad when the articles to which you allude were printed, the newspaper being left during his absence under the guidance of Mr. Healy. Mr. Healy became aware that Mr. Fottrell, whom he detests, was writing an inspired article for the *Fortnightly Review*; *hinc illae lachrymae*. Mr. Parnell assured me that he took the earliest opportunity on Mr. O'Brien's return to explain his favourable views and wishes with regard to your visit with Dilke to Ireland.

Respecting the general matter, Mr. Parnell informed me that in his opinion the state of affairs has materially changed during the last few weeks. In the first place, the Land Question has again assumed a serious aspect, and important agitators, rivals of his, are suggesting either "No Rent" or "Such rent as you please". Then, while he has carefully followed the course of your efforts, in furtherance of views in more or less accordance with his own, as explained to him from time to time by me, he holds that Mr. Gladstone's declaration with regard to the Crimes Act remains the landmark of the policy of the late Government.

On the other hand, without requiring or requesting any corresponding support in other things, the new Administration, on examination of the state of Ireland, immediately declared that it could not conscientiously reimpose exceptional legislation on that country. The House of Lords has without a murmur passed the Irish Registration Bill; the Labourers Bill, much neglected by the Liberals, is now promised. Mr. Parnell then talked about Lord Carnarvon's speech, especially about the passages declaring his mind to be open and recording his approval of the system adopted by the colonies, under whose laws English, Irish and Scotch dwell together in amity. If this, continued Mr. Parnell, foreshadows as the Tory policy the similar legislative independence of Ireland, it is exactly his own policy, which is not, and never has been, Separation. But should satisfactory evidence be forthcoming that legislative independence is likely to be proposed within a reasonable time, Mr. Parnell said that he thinks it doubtful whether it would be worth while to encumber the Irish question at present with a larger extension of local government to Ireland than to England.

In the meanwhile I had been endeavouring to impress on him the quackery of the Tories and the folly of losing the substance in grasping at the shadow. I mentioned Mr. T. P. O'Connor's letter on the Wakefield election, and the determination expressed in it to credit the Government with good intentions pending a declaration of its Irish policy. I suggested that this was a very long tether. Mr. Parnell replied that only a reasonable time need be granted, and he instanced the Irish estimates as affording the occasion to invite a descent from the vague. It is but right to mention that throughout the conversation he expressed very kind personal feeling, and he concluded by observing that it must not be considered unreasonable under the altered complexion of the situation, that he should take a few days for further reflexion before giving a definite and definitive reply to the categorical questions in your letter.

CHAP.
XXV.
Æt. 49.

P.S.—So as to avoid misunderstanding, I have made a copy of this letter for Mr. Parnell.

When Chamberlain received this elusive epistle the scales began to fall from his eyes. Very soon those eyes, so clear by nature, became relentlessly keen. Next, Herbert Gladstone made a full-blooded Home Rule speech at Leeds.¹ Fraternisation between Tory democracy and Irish Nationalism warmly displayed itself during debate in the House of Commons on a tragic episode of Spencer's coercionist regime. More days passed since Parnell's request, according to Mercury, for time to consider before giving a "definite and definitive" reply, and he sent no word. The Radical leader drew the moral; and drew the line, once and for ever.

As a result of my conversations with O'Shea and his statements, I came to the conclusion that Parnell was trying to negotiate a better bargain with the Tories; in fact O'Shea said "he has had a better offer". Under these circumstances it seemed unwise to pursue the matter any further, and accordingly I told O'Shea to let Parnell know that so far as I was concerned the matter was at an end.²

Thus, after eight months of futile finesse, the unhappy emissary was ordered to notify to the Irish leader the rupture of relations. A momentous message went to Eltham:

¹ July 14, 1885.

² Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

O'SHEA TO PARNELL¹

1 ALBERT MANSIONS, LONDON, S.W.,

July 29, 1885.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

MY DEAR PARNELL—On the 27th Mr. Chamberlain asked me whether you had yet answered the question in the letter from him respecting the Irish Local Government scheme which I showed you. I replied that I was unfortunately without any information from you. After some observations he requested me to inform you that under the peculiar circumstances, the Liberal Leaders who had adopted your proposal to them, and who had run much risk in promoting the adoption of it, must now drop it from the programme.—Yours very truly,

W. H. O'SHEA.

It will turn out that Chamberlain's resolve, as expressed in this letter, seals Gladstone's political fate and Parnell's; the fate of the Liberal party and of the old Irish party too in the long run.

The cup of bitterness nearly full was brimmed by the prelates, whose benediction Manning had led our Radicals to expect. The Irish bishops were as discouraging as the Cardinal at Westminster. Herbert Gladstone at Leeds had spoken of a "Parliament on College Green", in words too little regarded in England—we shall have to return to them—but they caused all Ireland to regard him rightly as the herald of his father. Nationalists of all shades and stripes could no longer see the sands for the mirage. They assumed that both the British parties were about to tumble over each other in competition for the Irish vote.

Dr. Butler, Bishop of Limerick, wrote that though he had formerly welcomed the proposed Irish visit of the Radical leaders, Chamberlain's scheme was now "out of date and no longer acceptable". Next and last, at the very end of July, Dr. Walsh's repudiation arrived from the Irish College at Rome.² For this, then, the two Radicals had involved themselves in much unpleasantness to ensure his elevation as Archbishop of Dublin.

Dr. Walsh had mildly blessed the visit even after the

¹ Copy in Chamberlain's "Memorandum."

² Dr. Walsh, while at Rome, was already in friendly touch with the

Conservative viceroy. (Sir Arthur Hardinge, *The Fourth Earl of Carnarvon*, vol. iii. p. 171.)

attacks in *United Ireland*. On him at least our Radical leaders had relied. Now he said that their tour would be interpreted in Ireland as hostile to the excellent tenor and promise of Lord Carnarvon's Conservative regime. 'I deeply regret my being thus hindered from writing, as I had intended, to our Bishops throughout the country, asking them to give what help they could to make the projected visit a success.'¹

CHAP.
XXV.
Æt. 49.

VIII

On August 1 Mr. Gladstone wrote to Chamberlain a significant word, the last letter between them before the veteran's epoch-making advance. He had caused his Chief Whip to renew enquiries through Mrs. O'Shea. Her answers had been enigmatical. He writes incidentally:² "As yet I have entirely failed to extract any independent information on the question whether the Central Board scheme is dead or not".

It was stone-dead.

On the very Saturday when Mr. Gladstone made this probing remark the interview between Parnell and Carnarvon—after a month of discussion and negotiation carried on through Justin McCarthy and Sir Howard Vincent—took place almost spectrally in the deserted house, 15 Hill Street, Mayfair, amidst dust-sheets and rolled-up carpets.³ There were no witnesses. Satisfied now was the Irish dictator that he would mould one or other of the British parties according as the General Election might turn out within four short months. He ceased to consider the possibility that the steel of another might be as hard as his own and perhaps sharper. Though Chamberlain knew nothing yet of the Hill Street interview, two days after⁴ he wrote to O'Shea: "As regards the Irish, they are gone and I am not certain that I regret it. I am inclined to give them a bit of my mind in public some day, but perhaps discretion will be the better part of valour". Three weeks later Parnell's high

¹ Archbishop Walsh to Dilke, July 29, 1885. The original is amongst the Chamberlain Papers.

² Most of the letter is about the Conservative Land Purchase Bill. Chamberlain's reply to the enquiry about the National Council policy was

given in conversation with Gladstone some days later.

³ Barry O'Brien, *Parnell*, vol. ii. p. 52; Hardinge, *The Fourth Earl of Carnarvon*, vol. iii. pp. 177-181.

⁴ August 3, 1885.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

demand for "legislative independence" forced the issue and opened a mortal combat.

It seems impossible to overestimate the effect of this episode on events from that day to this. Nor are the motives low and petty on the part of any of the principals. Inscrutable destiny works through a facile intriguer, who hopes to oil his own wheels by plausible versions to both sides, and fears to tell to either side the whole truth about what he knows to be the real position of each, lest his own inutility should be exposed. To Parnell he does not tell, until he is forced, the truth about Chamberlain's unyielding reservations. To Chamberlain he does not tell, for long after this, what had been Parnell's unyielding conditions from the beginning. So, as often in the world's affairs, malign misunderstandings were spread as though imps wove the plot.

In fullest goodwill had Chamberlain opened an enterprise venturesome and hazardous enough when undertaken. He had conducted it with courage and fidelity. He had broken a Cabinet for a policy of "practical" Irish settlement in the full belief that it was Parnell's own. Then he had not flinched from staking his career on the same issue in public speeches. Now he saw himself thrown over by Parnell, by Manning, by Walsh; villainously reviled in the Nationalist press; and sold to "the Tories". Bitterest of all, if he and Dilke had not upset a Liberal Ministry for the sake of moderate self-government in Ireland and for the beginnings of Home-Rule-All-Round, "the "Stop-gap Government" never would have held office; "the Tories" never would have been in a position before the elections to make large-seeming counter-bids pledging them to nothing.

An experience like this in public or private life he had never known. Though often we shall see him hazardous enough in sanguine initiative, he took care that nothing quite of the same kind ever happened to him afterwards. The Nationalists he nevermore trusted nor liked. But it is the most trivial error to suppose, as even Davitt did, that after the mad abuse in *United Ireland*, "Parnell's paper", he was alienated by merely personal resentment. Again and again through years he had declared his mind. Nothing on earth would induce him to accept for his part any measure implying

formally or virtually the weakening of the Imperial connection between Great Britain and Ireland—the loosening or lessening of the United Kingdom. Inflexibly opposed to “separate parliaments”, he intended that whatever system of devolution might be framed, the Imperial Parliament should remain the same in its supremacy—the centre of unity in an undivided realm. Undoubtedly he was henceforth resolved on one thing—that in the great attempt to overmaster the whole parliamentary system, and to force Repeal or its equivalent by that means, Parnell should find another man in the way.

CHAP.
XXV.
ÆT. 49.

No more than anyone else did he yet know his own full capacity. Parnell, Cardinal Manning, Archbishop Walsh had all profoundly underestimated the Radical leader, as Gladstone above all was soon to do with less excuse. Disraeli, perhaps, would not have made the same mistake.

Parnell pursued a political system masterly in its mechanics but as inferior in its psychics so far as these related to the estimate of men and forces other than Irish. Otherwise he was not to blame. The Nationalist leader's letters of January 6 and January 13, 1885, had perfectly defined the issue. For him, in truth, the plan of an administrative National Council meant a useful half-way house, but with “very little effect one way or other upon the larger question”. He had ordered O'Shea to make this view absolutely plain to Chamberlain so as to avoid misunderstanding. We know how the go-between kept back these letters; Chamberlain did not learn of their existence for nearly two years,¹ and was led to believe that whatever romance Parnell might talk in public to his Celts he agreed that National Councils in practice would settle the Irish Question for a long time.

O'Shea luxuriated in his own sense of persuasiveness and address. He had put himself forward and had to sustain his rôle. He glowed in the notion that he was doing the great thing for Ireland and himself. That there was no man whom the Irish leader humoured more, hated more and trusted less, than

¹ “In October 1886 there was a paragraph in *Truth* by Mr. Labouchere, saying that Parnell denied having ever approved of the National Councils scheme. Mr. O'Shea wrote to Labouchere to complain, and Labouchere re-

plied that his informant was Mr. Parnell. Mr. O'Shea then showed Labouchere the two letters from Mr. Parnell dated January 5 and January 13, 1885” (Chamberlain's “Memorandum”).

BOOK VI. 1885. the luckless, self-complacent emissary, Chamberlain could not conceive. When the Gladstone Government fell Parnell was no longer bound in any way to a plan which that Government had refused.

Yet for as far as it went it was in fact "Parnell's plan"—as he said, "the central Local Government body which I propose". In treating men of the calibre of the two Radical Ministers as mere items—or spare parts—in his system of political mechanics; in not giving them one human word of warning or recognition; in allowing without stern rebuke the brutal unfairness of the attacks in *United Ireland*, he made in his fatalistic way a needless and enormous error; and paid for it more and more to the end. Chamberlain had no hand in his final fall—as will be seen in a later chapter—and yet, had he been made a firm friend, he was the one man who could have saved Parnell from O'Shea. To the fibre of his coming antagonist the Irish leader, though by no means yet measuring him, had paid already discerning tribute. Parnell thought that he could "squeeze more out of Gladstone than he could out of Chamberlain".¹

¹ Parnell in conversation with John O'Connor, June 1885. See Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 153 n.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FALL OF DILKE: FRIENDSHIP AND TRAGEDY

(JUNE 1885—AUGUST 1886)

THE Dreams of June—The Sequel in July—"Friendship's Garland"
—A Cabinet Colloquy on Religion—Dilke at the Zenith—The Charge
and his Despair—A Summer turned Dark—Chamberlain's Heroic
Friendship—Hope and Disaster—The First and Second Trials—
Virulent Attacks on Chamberlain for his supposed Unwise Advice—
His Silence and Vindication—Friends ever: Colleagues no more—
What might have been—"The Saddest Tragedy of All".

I

WHERE were the dreams of June? The end of July was darkened by double calamity. The Radical excursion to Ireland could not have taken place even had the Irish leader bestowed his favour. The tour had been planned to begin early in August. Before that date the shadow of disaster irretrievable fell suddenly upon Dilke and destroyed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye", the political power of a friendship as dear to Chamberlain as his own life. As it seemed then and for long all the former conditions of his career were altered for the worse, indomitable as in himself he was. Believing passionately in his ally's innocence, Chamberlain stood by him, fought for him, brought him back to health and courage, solaced and sustained him like a brother.

For a year—and as much after the first trial of the divorce case as before it—this friend of friends hoped desperately that the cloud would pass. It was not to be. "Nothing was ever nobler than the way in which he stood by Dilke in the great scandal", said Lord Morley to the present writer. Calumny and disparagement have not spared Chamberlain even in this con-

BOOK
VI.
1885-86.

nection, where his conduct, without flaw or stain, was nothing less than heroic through an ordeal as dreadful of its kind as any episode in political history. This chapter in his biography is difficult to write. It must be done as simply as fitness admits. It reveals in a full light the value of his heart and the core of his character.

"During our acquaintance now lasting through a considerable period we have been united by a close political and personal friendship, which has known no break or interruption and which has been one of the greatest pleasures of my public life. During all that time I don't recollect that we have ever had a serious difference of opinion upon any important subject. Since I have been in the House of Commons we have never voted in different lobbies. On the other hand, we have often stood shoulder to shoulder in many a contest, sometimes in a small minority, sometimes entirely alone, always with absolute mutual trust and confidence and without a trace of those petty personal jealousies which so often spoil the intercourse of public men."¹

Since Chamberlain used these words in welcoming Dilke's appearance on the platform of Birmingham Town Hall some eighteen months had passed. By now every tie of the friendship had become more closely knitted. Let us see what it was at this time on the personal side. The devotion between them had never ceased to grow. Sympathy in like sorrows had broken their earlier reserve. They had both known the household griefs, and what difficulties follow when children are left while the mother is gone and the man is alone. Dilke's first wife died young in 1874. Chamberlain had passed twice through that valley before he entered the House of Commons. We have seen how for eighteen months little "Wentie" Dilke was taken into Chamberlain's family at Highbury and thought it so much better than any other home that he wanted his father to live there too.

II

A singular record of another kind shows in an intimate way how thoughtful were the relations between the minds of the

¹ Town Hall, Birmingham, December 17, 1883. Chamberlain's speech upon the occasion of Dilke's visit.

two men apart from politics. They were accustomed to converse silently at Cabinet meetings by passing slips of paper up and down the table while other Ministers were talking. In this way, at a Cabinet held shortly after Gordon's death, they discussed nothing less than religion.¹

CHAP.
XXVI.
Æt. 49-50.

This odd incident, like a page from Boswell, arose out of a letter from that accomplished man Edward Russell of the *Liverpool Daily Post*, one of the Radical leader's warmest admirers. Russell thinks well to send candid information of much that is being said in the north by good ordinary Liberals. Some say that Chamberlain is playing for ambition; others that Dilke really wants to be a new Palmerston, who may show opportunist dexterity in office but will sit pretty loose to principle.

But what has most interested me [Russell of Liverpool goes on] has been the religious aspect of this little discussion. You may perhaps be surprised to hear that it has one, but I have been several times spoken to on this subject and in each case have found that you [Chamberlain] were not the favourite in this regard, and those who dwell upon it say that it is going to make a great difference as to your chances. . . . It is alleged, and you won't mind my giving you all the gossip frankly, that you are brusque and cynically disrespectful about religion—do not, and cannot, use its dialect or awaken its emotions in audiences. This, however, is pointed out to be a great secret of Mr. Gladstone's magnetism, making the dissenters, curiously enough, ready to die for, and what is more, trust implicitly, one whom they know to be a High Churchman.

As for Dilke, adds Russell, he "used openly to be called an atheist", but "I have been solemnly told that he has found belief".²

Chamberlain answers roundly:

I may assure you that one of the statements made by you at any rate is entirely without foundation. My religious opinions are a matter for my own conscience, and I should not consent to discuss them with strangers, but I am confident that no one has ever heard from me either in private

¹ February 20, 1885. Dilke has left a record of the business at this Cabinet. It was a remarkable sitting. "The subjects discussed were Egypt (Finance and Suez Canal) and sending a colonial force to Suakim. Chamberlain had developed to Childers at the same meet-

ing a proposal that Hartington should form a Ministry to carry on the Sudan War with the loyal support of those of us who went out with Mr. Gladstone" (Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 110).

² E. R. Russell to Chamberlain, February 13, 1885.

BOOK
VI.
1885-86.

or in public a disrespectful word about religion in general or about the opinions of any religious body. I have too much reverence for what lies at the bottom of all religion to use its language as a mere instrument of political controversy, and I am content to be without any influence which can only be obtained by such means.¹

When, a couple of days afterwards, the Radical Ministers meet in Cabinet, this question of spiritual faith is mentioned between them and they fill several sides of the large Downing Street notepaper with confessions and reflections of uncommon candour:

A DIALOGUE ON RELIGION

Dilke.—I never talked to you on these matters. I never talk to anyone about them. I was brought up in the Church by a very devout mother and afterwards grandmother. I never left the Church in which I was married and in which, from my love of Church music (chiefly), I always attended frequently though not regularly. I'm really a Positivist more than anything else, but I think they are asses! I have a very strong belief in Christ's moral teachings and a good deal of what is called religious feeling. I don't like *not* to say this to you but I have never said it to anybody else at all, and hope I never shall. I agree with you about the afterwards. But the teaching ought to have a great effect on the present.

Chamberlain.—I agree with the teaching—but Christ was not the only Teacher, though the most prominent, and His teaching resulted in the foundation of a new Religion.

Dilke.—There's a good deal to be said both ways about that. The doctrines of patriotism and devotion to duty taught by Plato were noble ones, and there is a great deal very beautiful in Confucius, but to my mind the teachings of Christ and of *Paul* are wonderfully before their time as regards the individual, altogether superior to any other ancient work. They have above all affected *all* modern thought—even that of anti-religious writers.

Chamberlain.—Yes, but remember Paul especially based himself on the hope of a future life. "If Christ be not risen, then am I of all men the most miserable." When the immortality of the Lord is denied or in doubt the whole platform of Christianity receives a severe shock.

¹ Chamberlain to E. R. Russell, February 17, 1885.

Dilke.—It is of very real value to me and that is something—to me. I might have been the *Pall Mall* correspondent who, in reply to Percy Gray—"the Agnostic at Church"—with his involved argument, said—"I go to Church because I like it and it does me good".¹ CHAP.
XXVI.
Æt. 49-50.

There, Mr. Gladstone's summing-up of a question, or some other turn of Cabinet matters, ended this silent colloquy.

Chamberlain always swallowed his own smoke, but for ten years now he had been unable to take an optimistic view of the human mystery; he thought that trying to do as much good as one can for human-kind while we are so temporarily alive is the only resort in a case like his own. The Unitarian discipline upheld him when its faith could no longer give him any sense of divine light. Since his second wife's death his spiritual struggle had been dark, the enigmas desolating. His fortitude was stern but bleak. When heart's happiness came to him again at long last, as it had just come to his friend, he also became more softened and serene in his reflections upon life and eternity, and upon the possibility beyond death of some existence "out of the body".

III

Personal feeling had been refreshed and quickened between them by a new and gracious influence. Towards the end of 1884, Dilke, who had been a widower for ten years, became engaged, when little over forty, to Mrs. Mark Pattison. After that, holding himself fortunate amongst men, agitated by a new happiness, he rose to the height of his powers and position through the last months of his unclouded public life. But it is likely enough that the prospect of this marriage roused by degrees amongst several persons the mingled motives that led to his ruin. Presently the complexity of the affair will appear. Of the very few informed of Dilke's engagement, Chamberlain was amongst the first, and he wrote to Mrs. Pattison what his comrade in the Cabinet calls "the best letter of his life". Already well known in the pages of Dilke's biography, it is a letter so essentially characteristic that it must be given here.²

¹ Chamberlain Papers.

² Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 92.

BOOK

VI.

1885-86.

TO MRS. PATTISON

November 5, 1884.—Dilke has told me his great secret, and I sympathise with him so warmly in the new prospects of happiness which are opening for him that I have asked leave to write to you and to offer my hearty congratulations.

I venture to think that we are already friends, and this adds greatly to the pleasure which this intelligence has given me.

For many years I have been on the most intimate terms with your future husband; and while I share the general opinion of the world as to his talents and force of character, I have better reason than any other man to appreciate his generosity and goodness and the chivalrous delicacy which a natural reserve conceals from casual acquaintance.

I prize his friendship as the best gift of my public life, and I rejoice unfeignedly that he will have a companion so well able to share his noblest ambitions and to brighten his life.

I know that you will forgive me this intrusion, which is justified by the fact that next to yourself I am more interested than anyone in the change which will bring so much happiness to my dear friend.

Little guessing what part he would have to play in the near sequel, the more he met Mrs. Pattison the more he admired her. When in the spring of 1885 she went to Madras to stay at Government House with the Grant Duffs—the marriage was to take place on her return—he wrote to her with unwonted glow in further appreciation of Dilke, then at the zenith:

May 17, 1885.— . . . The latter has deservedly gained universal praise for his management of the Seats Bill. Nothing could be better, and his knowledge, courtesy and tact are in everyone's mouth. I have long since known that he would always do any work that fell to him in the best possible way, but he has undoubtedly added to his reputation with others by the masterly manner in which he has carried through this difficult business.

He is as unstinted in direct generosity to his friend. The Gladstone Government had no sooner resigned than, at the City Liberal Club, Dilke, delighted and invigorated to be out of bondage, spoke with more fire than he had been thought to possess.¹ Of the two, he was making the running just at that

¹ June 9, 1885.

moment, but Chamberlain responds at once: "Your speech was admirable to read and I have heard from one who was present that the effect was electrical. You never did better in your life."¹ Next, Dilke insists that he must have a portrait of his political twin, and suggests the brush of Frank Holl. The twin answers: "I think Holl a fine painter, but I will sit for you to anyone you like."² But in a tender way—for it is true that Chamberlain, little given to that quality, was more tender at this time to Dilke than to anyone—he fears that his ally, who had lately begun to display excitement and strain now and then, is overtaxing himself: "Do not run any risk. . . . We shall have plenty of opportunities." Next he reports gaily from Highbury, after seeing Schnadhorst, that fortune is waving bright wings over them both.

CHAP.
XXVI.
Æt. 49-50.

I hear very encouraging accounts of the feeling in the country. I am assured that we [the Radicals] never held so strong a position—that the counties will be swept for the Liberals—and that the whole atmosphere of the House of Commons will be changed after November. I firmly believe this to be true. A little patience and we shall secure all we have fought for.³

Just before Dilke's torture these were the private terms of a perfect comradeship.

IV

In politics proper it was the same. Nothing, they conceived, could divide them except women's suffrage, and that was in the background. As to Ministerial prospects, Dilke's star shines in the ascendant and Chamberlain does not in the least grudge this, though he knows that he is the dynamic spirit and will always possess superior power whatever the forms.

Dilke has his feverish moods at this time. When told by Chamberlain that he must withdraw his threat to leave the Front Opposition Bench as a protest against the baronetcy for the backstairs envoy to the Vatican, he pleads to Gladstone: "I fancy that overwork and long-continued loss of all holidays

¹ June 11, 1885.

² June 18, 1885. Holl's well-known portrait of Chamberlain was bequeathed by Dilke to the National

Portrait Gallery.

³ Chamberlain to Dilke, June 30, 1885.

BOOK
VI.
1885-86.

except Sundays have told upon me and that I must be inclined to take too serious a view of things".¹ Next day he writes to his future wife of his "perpetual brain fatigue". This was the penalty of his consuming and systematic industry. We have seen how he seeks to make himself an embodied encyclopaedia of politics, domestic, Imperial, foreign, and comes as near as may be to success in that purpose. That it tends to overweight him does not yet show. Not only knowledge is his power. With all his knowledge he has in singular combination acumen, terseness, clarity and tact.

Few divined the extent of inward strain he confessed. Nothing seemed to impede his advance. On matters known to concern equally both the Radical allies, Gladstone, Manning, Walsh and others preferred to communicate direct not with Chamberlain but with Dilke in these last midsummer weeks of his political and social vogue. Just before the crash he presided by common consent in July at the three weekly meetings of the cabal suggested by Chamberlain—the Radical Five, including Morley, though he had not yet held office, as well as Trevelyan and Shaw-Lefevre. According to the diary of Sir Charles himself—and there is no cause to question his account, though no corroboration exists amongst his friend's papers—he had received an assurance entitling him to believe that he would attain without doubt the pinnacle of political dreams. This was forty-eight hours before a certain Ibsen-like scene in the small hours of the night between a staid Scottish member of Parliament and his very young wife.

Dilke records, after he knows the charge against him:

It is curious that only a week ago [which if literally exact would mean Thursday, July 16] Chamberlain and I had agreed, at his wish and suggestion, that I should be the future leader, as being more popular in the House, though less in the country, than he was, and that only three days ago Mr. Gladstone had expressed the same wish.²

To both this understanding seemed justified and reasonable; yet it implied an audacity of assumption unknown before or since. At this fluid phase of political transition two statesmen

¹ Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 152 (Dilke to Gladstone, June 29, 1885.)

² *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 167 (diary under date July 23, 1885).

in their forties can take it upon themselves to settle confidently, and as a matter of course, which of them shall become Prime Minister within a couple of years or so. After that short period, as they assume, the patriarchal leader—whom, with recurrent misgivings, they extol for the purposes of the next General Election—must retire owing to the extremity of his age and the exhaustion of his fabulous vitality. Two more sessions with him in the first democratic Parliament—that was the utmost imagined or desired by the Radical pair. He would serve to settle the Irish Question by devolution without revolution.

CHAP.
XXVI.
ÆT. 49-50.

On the greatest issue between us and the Whigs, Mr. G. is on our side, and has told Harcourt that, if he stands at the General Election, he will make this a prominent feature in his platform and will adopt in principle our scheme of Local Government and devolution. This will immensely strengthen our position if we finally decide to press the matter.¹

So in the last chapter we found Chamberlain writing. Similarly, Dilke notes:

Mr. Gladstone sent for me and told me that whether he would lead the party or would not, at the dissolution, or in the new parliament, would depend on whether the main plank in the programme was what I called Home Rule or what Chamberlain called the National Council Scheme, or only the ordinary scheme of Local Government for all parts of the United Kingdom. If the latter alone was to be contemplated, he said that others would suffice for the task.²

In mid-July of 1885 Sir Charles, on the strength of his ally's "wish and suggestion", might well expect to reach the Premiership in a few sessions.

Chamberlain, it must truly be confessed, was incapable of secondary ambition regarding the substance of power. For action, decision, real leadership, he would have remained the master-spirit. For nominal precedence he cared nothing. Willing in heart, he was as sound in judgment when in his straight way he removed the only tacit ambiguity remaining between the two and decided that his friend ought to be the first Radical Prime Minister. Dilke, by comparison, did not excite popular enthusiasm. Not magnetic on the platform or in the House,

¹ Chamberlain to Dilke, June 28, 1885.—See p. 16.

² Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 155 (diary, Monday, July 6).

BOOK
VI.
1885-86.

usually described as cool or impassive in manner, he undoubtedly carried at this time more parliamentary weight. Far wider than Chamberlain's were his connections, social, literary, diplomatic, colonial, foreign. No one then seemed so well trained to be a Prime Minister. Cartoonists seized upon his flying coat-tails to express his incessant activity. One of these allies was more trenchant in character and concentrated in aim, but made more enemies. Dilke, though much the more impulsive at unexpected moments now and then, was ordinarily equable and persuasive, shunned provocative words when he expressed extreme principles, and made friends on every side.

The regime would, of course, have been a real duumvirate. Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and unquestioned principal in domestic questions. In external, Dilke, advanced Radical indeed, but also Imperialist both informed and convinced. He in the end, we may suspect, would have gone to the House of Lords.¹ The political powers of these two were distinct and complementary. Together they might have reorganised social and Imperial policy in time to correct the world's general impression of increasing British weakness and to prevent the Great War. The Chancellor would never have been jealous nor the Prime Minister assuming. It might have been a wonderful association had fate allowed. It seemed not only an attainable dream, but a proximate probability, up to the sudden hour that blasted Dilke's life.

Nothing of its kind known is more pathetic than Dilke's anticipations at forty-two—full of youth and ability as he felt—of a career far-stretched into age like Gladstone's but more composed, judicious and effectual.

It is in old age that power comes. An old man in English politics may exert enormous power without effort and with no drain at all upon his health and vital force. The work of thirty or forty years of political life [elected at twenty-five, he had been already nearly seventeen years in the House of Commons] goes in England to the building-up of political reputation and position. During that long period no power is exercised

¹ Chamberlain dissented at this time from Dilke's suggestion that no future Liberal Premier ought to be in the Lords, "I should not support a motion

as to Prime Minister being in Commons. In a Tory Government it is a very good arrangement" (Chamberlain to Dilke, June 11, 1885).

except by irregular means such as the use of threats of resignation. It is in old age only that power comes that can be used legitimately and peacefully by the once-strong man.¹

CHAP.
XXVI.
Æt. 49-50.

These moving words were addressed to Mrs. Pattison in Madras. When that devoted woman received them, Dilke's death-blow as a leading statesman and coming Prime Minister had been struck by another woman.

V

Already we know that Chamberlain never doubted Dilke's innocence in this dire case. Of its origins some brief account here is unavoidable. Mr. Donald Crawford was member for one of the divisions of Lanark. Under the late Liberal Government he had been secretary to the Lord Advocate, and closely associated with Sir Charles Dilke in the preparation of the Redistribution Bill. He was middle-aged. His wife, whom he had married four years before, was at this time only twenty-two. She was sister to Mrs. Ashton Dilke, widow of Sir Charles's brother, whose death had made John Morley member for Newcastle-on-Tyne. Mr. Crawford, M.P., had received anonymous communications in disguised hands deriding him for blindness to his wife's infidelity. One of the letters named "the member for Chelsea". Disregarding this, Crawford came to suspect another person, rightly as it turned out. Coming home late on Friday, July 17, he found on his hall-table another anonymous message, calling him "Fool" and telling him in effect, without mentioning names, that he had been doubly deceived but "dare not touch the real traitor". From midnight onwards the fateful scene with his wife took place.

Against Dilke the different motives of various persons converged. Vengeance and evasion, desperation and calculation, were reinforced by some hostilities, convinced and implacable. Some enigmas never have been elucidated. Obscure still is the aim of the anonymous delations. One of Mrs. Crawford's impulses was to screen another affair afterwards confessed. Little is certain except that, within two or three days after

¹ Dilke's *Life*, vol ii. p. 153 (to Mrs. Pattison, June 30, 1885).

BOOK
VI

1885-86.

her excited but consecutive statement in the night it became her concentrated object to destroy Dilke.

On Saturday evening, within twenty-four hours after this domestic explosion, Dilke was warned. On the Sunday morning he learned the nature of the charge and never again was the same man. For several days Chamberlain and two others—Sir Henry James and Mr. J. B. Balfour, lately the Lord Advocate to whom Mr. Crawford had been secretary—worked desperately to avert public proceedings. Nothing would turn from that purpose the man who believed he had been foully wronged.¹ It became certain that the case would come into court. Then Chamberlain wrote to Morley:

July 23, 1885.—Just a word to say that I am a prey to horrible mental anxiety—the cause of which will be made public in a day or two. It does not concern me directly—but it is most dreadful.

Dilke himself was not only in “as great misery as perhaps ever fell on man”. Utterly as he repudiated the charge, agonised as he was for Mrs. Pattison, still weak after typhoid in India, he felt crushed to the earth and doomed by a hideous fate. He felt from the outset what he said to his friend after the first disastrous trial:

The fall was as you know in my opinion final and irretrievable on the day on which the charge was made in July last—as would be that, in these days, of any man against whom such a false charge was made by conspiracy and careful preparation. I think, as I have always thought, that the day will come when all will know, but it will come too late for political life to be resumed with power or real use.²

Apart from his wish, above all, that Mrs. Pattison should believe him, Dilke thought of nothing but retiring from public life and never again entering the House of Commons. Sombre was this instinct, but the premonition proved true.

Chamberlain would not hear of it. He thought it moral suicide. Dilke’s retirement from public life would be a national

¹ “The husband was asked to submit particulars of his accusation, with Dilke’s defence, to any private friend of his own choosing, before bringing a public charge; and in order that some honourable and impartial man might

express an opinion as to whether he would be justified in proceeding farther. He refused absolutely” (Chamberlain to Edward Russell of the *Liverpool Daily Post*, August 14, 1885).

² Dilke to Chamberlain, May 5, 1886.

loss. He could not conceive his own career without his ally. The accused man's disappearance from the political scene would have the most sinister effect upon public opinion. A fighter unquenchable himself, believing vehemently in his friend's innocence, the Radical leader could not imagine any course but fighting the case out when Dilke had recovered from the first stupefying shock.

CHAP.
XXVI.
Æt. 49-50.

About a week after the fatal Sunday he brought his broken ally down to Highbury. Dilke remained there from the end of July until the earlier part of September. Before the visit ended it made a new man of him:

I owe to you that I was able to live at all through that awful time, and I owe you my present happiness—a perfect blessedness of daily life, whatever happens. Though I take the blackest view of what the world will continue to think of me, yet I know that while Emilia lives she will believe in me, and I shall be blessed in my home—wherever it may be. You kept me for this, and made me live and hope when I saw no ray of light—for though I believe absolutely in her trust, as you know I thought that the blow would kill her too. My dear old fellow, I shall never be able to repay—but I can't forget.¹

Intensely preoccupied already with his great series of speeches in the autumn, and meaning them to be a supreme effort, as they were, Chamberlain was prepared to give up everything at the time for his friend; to go anywhere with him; to do anything that might put fresh heart and strength into Dilke.

To Chamberlain fell the hard task of explaining the position to Mrs. Pattison.

He wrote to her at once when the brief hope of avoiding public proceedings had failed:

July 24, 1885.— . . . He is the victim of an hysterical delusion or a base conspiracy. I believe he feels more for you and his friends than for himself, although he regards the charge as precluding him from any further public life, and as destructive of his public career. This is not my opinion. I do not relinquish the hope that we may clear him of all the gravest elements of the accusation, but however this may be, nothing will alter my affection for him, nor my will to serve him to the utmost in my power.

¹ Dilke to Chamberlain, May 6, 1886.

BOOK
VI.
1885-86.

And again:

July 29, 1885.—I wrote to you last Friday under great depression. The charge which has been threatened against Dilke is one which the best and strongest man may quail under, and coming, as it did, after a session of exhausting work I do not wonder that our friend was unnerved and prostrated. His natural sentiment of shrinking and repulsion, and his readiness to take pessimistic views affected his friends also for the time; and I think I was induced to write more despairingly than the circumstances justified. At any rate I am glad now to say that I am more hopeful and that I think there is good reason to expect that we may defeat this odious conspiracy. . . . We persuaded Dilke not to go abroad as that might have the appearance of running away. He is now at my house at Highbury, whence he writes me in better spirits, and I am glad to say that he is coming to the House next week to face the reports which have gained currency under these circumstances. His friends, Harcourt, James and others, are standing by him manfully, and I believe there is a very general sympathy with him in this great trial. I do not know if you may not have left before this reaches India. If you receive this letter, I venture to impress upon you that his greatest anxiety is due to his affection for yourself. If you can reassure him by a telegram or a letter pray do so, and you will assist, more than all we can do, to encourage him to defend his character and confound his enemies.

On receiving this letter Mrs. Pattison's action was great. She telegraphed to Dilke at Highbury the assurance of her faith and courage. She telegraphed to *The Times*¹ announcing her engagement to Sir Charles. She wrote to Chamberlain:

Ootacamund, Madras, August 15, 1885.—I knew from the first I could rely on your goodness and devotion to him. . . . I *never* doubted for a moment his perfect innocence. . . . I telegraphed at once to him to announce the engagement and announced it myself. . . . As to abandoning his political career it would be ridiculous. . . . I am sure of my own nerve and sure that I can stand a long pull; all my combative instincts are roused, and I inherit a large supply of them. . . . I am ready to do anything which you think wise to be done—you may rely on my being ready and proud to co-operate with you in any way you may point out. I have written to him as lightly as possible, and indeed I do not believe it is more at the worst than a temporary and bitter annoyance.

¹ The notice appeared in *The Times* of August 18, 1885.

With this dauntless reply in his hand, Chamberlain was enraptured and sent a ringing word to Dilke:

CHAP.
XXVI.
Æt. 49-50.

I have splendid letters from India this evening—just what I expected. *I am always right!* When I see you I shall chaff your head off about your nervousness and fears. “Somebody” has more courage than most men.¹

Dilke himself was now full of fight and in high spirits.

When Mrs. Pattison came home from India he was married to her at Chelsea Parish Church on October 3, 1885. Chamberlain was best man.

VI

The grim sequel cannot be fully narrated here, but must be summarised for reasons essential to this biography. Whole-hearted was Chamberlain’s confidence in the coming acquittal of his ally and the restoration of their comradeship to its former power. These opinions he expressed on all sides. Out of many examples of his unswerving hope a few must be given:

August 14, 1885.—To Edward Russell of Liverpool.— . . . As regards Dilke, you know I am his most intimate friend, and should in any case stand by him in this time of trial. I know all the circumstances of this affair, and am confident that he would not deceive me, as to any fact in connection with it. I am therefore able positively to assert that the charge is untrue. . . .

October 22, 1885.—To John Morley.—F. Harrison’s sources of information are tainted. Please tell him from me for what it is worth that I am *certain* Dilke is innocent of the charge brought against him. I do not answer for his whole life—nor for my own—nor for any man’s—but the particular charge and its accompaniments are false.

Further, Chamberlain said to many, concerning what was alleged to have taken place in Dilke’s own residence in Sloane Street: “If you had been in and out of his house at all times as I have been, you would see that they [the charges] were impossible”.²

At last, on February 12, 1886, the first trial took place before Mr. Justice Butt. For seats there was a rush and a scramble

¹ Chamberlain to Dilke, September 7, midnight.

² Sir John Gorst recollected that these words were reiterated by Cham-

berlain in autumn 1886 after the second trial of the Dilke case (Dilke’s *Life*, vol. ii. p. 179).

BOOK
VI.
1885-86.

rarely seen. Chamberlain was conspicuous in the jury-box reserved for distinguished people with special orders of admission. The accusations were unfolded. Some were appalling. Dilke was powerfully represented by Sir Charles Russell, then Attorney-General, and by Sir Henry James, who had held the same office under the former Liberal Government and would have been Lord Chancellor could he have persuaded himself to become a Home Ruler. For reasons to be indicated presently, they took the startling decision not to put their client into the witness-box. This accorded with the technique of the law. The hearing ended in this manner:

MR. JUSTICE BUTT: I cannot see any case whatever against Sir Charles Dilke. By the law of England, a statement made by one party in the suit—a statement made not in the presence of the other—cannot be evidence against that other. I cannot see the shadow of a case.

SIR CHARLES RUSSELL: . . . Ought we to take upon ourselves the responsibility of putting Sir Charles Dilke in the witness-box where he might be put through the events of his whole life, and in the life of any man there may be found to have been indiscretions—ought we to take upon ourselves that responsibility? After an anxious consideration of that matter we have come to the determination to leave the case where it stands. . . .

SIR HENRY JAMES: . . . I may say we felt that if no case is made out against a man by legal evidence, there is no principle of law and none of justice which calls upon him to have his life dissected, which in the witness-box it might be, if it were the desire of an opponent to rake up anything in his past history. . . .

MR. JUSTICE BUTT: . . . With regard to the co-respondent Sir Charles Dilke, my decision is in accordance with what I have already indicated—namely, that there is no evidence worthy of the name as against him. Nothing can be clearer than the law on this subject—that is that the unsworn statement of a person in the position of Mrs. Crawford is not entitled to be received or even considered in a Court of Justice as against the person with whom she is alleged to have committed adultery. . . . Under these circumstances I have no hesitation whatever in saying that Counsel have been well advised in suggesting the course which they have induced Sir Charles Dilke to take.¹

¹ Report in *The Times*, February 13, 1886.

Thus there was a decree *nisi* against Mrs. Crawford, but the petition against the statesman brought in as co-respondent was dismissed with costs. After this bizarre verdict and the judge's emphasis in Dilke's favour his friends were exultant. None so much as Chamberlain. Instantly he sent a happy message to Gladstone. Next morning he received letters of congratulation from political sympathisers. But the country as a whole was staggered. On the minds of ordinary people the decision to keep Dilke out of the witness-box made first a dubious and then a damning impression. Chamberlain was involved unfairly in a detestable controversy, followed from that day to this by whispers and innuendos; and by what is worse, the unprejudiced ignorance of common report. This tissue of falsehood, some of it partisan, most of it careless, must be dealt with once for all.

It was openly said that his imperious will overruled Dilke's desire to face cross-examination. If this version had been true, or possessed any element of truth, Chamberlain, a layman, would have taken upon himself a rash responsibility and wrecked his friend by a presumptuous blunder. The truth is the opposite. Chamberlain from the first had been for fighting the case right out. He assumed all along that his friend would go into the box, when the case was tried, "to defend his character and confound his enemies". With his nature he was incapable of any other assumption.

Then on the day of the trial the unexpected occurred. Sir Charles Russell and Sir Henry James were driven to the conclusion that Dilke, in the absence of a vital witness, must not go into the box.

In justice to the memory of these great counsel it will be shown presently that they were not fools in the most reluctant professional decision that either of them ever had to take. They were amongst their client's close personal friends and devoted to his interests. But they were in a cruel quandary when Mr. Crawford had given his evidence and the Court adjourned for lunch. To their painful judgment Chamberlain himself at the last moment was forced to defer. For, in connection with the charges, a person whom here we may call X. had been mentioned in court. That person was the key of the case as concerning national opinion and Dilke's political future. The worst would certainly occur in

CHAP.
XXVI.
ÆT. 49-50.

BOOK
VI.
1885-86.

the shape of a verdict against Dilke, unless X. herself on oath in court denied Mrs. Crawford's allegations. But for one thing the vital witness was absent. For another thing it was understood that if she appeared this young and humble person, distracted by the affair, would certainly contradict Mrs. Crawford but would probably break down under fierce cross-examination. This was why Sir Charles Russell and Sir Henry James came to a decision contrary to all Chamberlain's advice and ideas until the middle of the day when the suit was being heard. At the last moment he concurred because to him too it seemed the only way to avert his friend's immediate ruin. At the discussion in Russell's room, Dilke was not present. Chamberlain went out into the corridor and told him the result. He acquiesced.

It has become a fashion to cite the course taken by Russell and James as a curious case of human fallibility. They were men of the world as well as pre-eminent lawyers. How, it is asked, could they have been so short-sighted as not to realise that whatever the technical arguments for keeping their client out of the witness-box, the effect on public opinion was bound to be morally and politically disastrous? The answer is that they knew well the gravity of their choice. They stood between two evils. Their duty was to do their best for their client. They would have thrust aside some other considerations and put Dilke into the box on one condition—that X. herself also appeared to deny on oath the worst of the charges and to withstand the browbeating certain to follow. But at that moment X. could not be produced. It was understood further that if she could be persuaded to appear she would collapse in nervous terror. These circumstances and these alone determined the decision of counsel that Dilke's unsupported testimony on the critical issue would not avail to prevent a verdict against him as well as against Mrs. Crawford. To keep Dilke out of the box, using the technical plea, was not regarded as a good course but as his only chance in a grim dilemma. Russell and James when decided in this sense convinced Chamberlain against every wish and expectation he had cherished up to then. None of the three ever changed opinion afterwards about their choice between two evils. It is open to anyone to judge that Dilke's crash ought to have been risked at once. It is not true to suppose that the alternatives

were not deeply considered. A good many of Dilke's friends and some others who studied the case retained, like Chamberlain, a firm belief in his innocence. But Chamberlain, Russell and James alike never altered their view that X. was "the key of the case", and that the hope of legal vindication depended wholly on the person who never appeared.

CHAP.
XXVI.
Æt. 49-50.

VII

Some days after this first trial Stead, in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, opened violent attacks upon Chamberlain, assailing him as having been the real person to blame for withholding Dilke when the latter was "ready and anxious" to face cross-examination. Chamberlain refused scornfully this sort of summons to explain himself. Always for some reason virulently hostile to Chamberlain, since Stead succeeded Morley as editor, the *Pall Mall Gazette* did him some real harm this time. It was impossible to make a plain statement without hurting his friend. This situation might have tried a saint's patience. It was a baneful annoyance, and agonised the Dilkes; but Chamberlain's staunchness was immovable. The words italicised below by the present writer stand eminently to his honour in these pages:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

February 22, 1886.—Dilke.— . . . I don't think you need it from me, but I write at Emilia's wish to say how shocked I am at the attack on you about me in the *Pall Mall Gazette* to-day. . . . You acted absolutely in my interest and with the fullest and most perfect regard to me and me alone, and I will not pretend that you were wrong.

February 22, 1886.—Chamberlain.—I was quite sure that the attack in *P.M.G.*—which in form was distinguished by Stead's usual malignity—did not come in any way from you. That being so *I am only glad to be able in any way to share your burthens and if I can act as a lightning conductor so much the better.* It is quite unnecessary for you to make any answer or to take any notice. We will both tell all whom it concerns that our friendship remains unchanged, and we will decline to discuss our private relations and conversations with strangers.

February 23, 1886.—Dilke.—Your letter to Stead is like you—that's all there is to say. I knew that even Stead turning round and throwing me at your head would not affect you. . . .

BOOK
VI.
1885-86.

February 28, 1886.—*Chamberlain*.— . . . I think my correspondence with . . . Stead reads well. I hope it may have some good effect. Whatever happens, be assured that I shall allow no lies or misrepresentations in any quarter to affect our relations.

Chamberlain advises Dilke to take his stand firmly upon the dismissal of the case against him. He must either resume regular attendance at the House of Commons or "go away altogether", or "give up your seat and perhaps fight again".¹ Very soon it becomes clear that there can only be a depressing future for Dilke in public life unless by hook or crook he secures a rehearing of the case and breaks the charges. At the prospect of this way of deliverance Chamberlain is rejoiced.

I see the Queen's Proctor is to intervene. I assume that you will be able to put the essential witnesses in the box. If they tell the truth and stand cross-examination you may yet be relieved from the abominable torments of the last twelve months. . . . It would make amends for everything and give me fresh courage and energy.²

The first suggestion of reopening the case by moving the Queen's Proctor to intervene, came from Stead.³ Chamberlain has been accused of this initiative also. He had commented from the first upon the suggested procedure, not with incitement but with care. "Of course if *you* were quite clear that you ought to go into the box, it is still possible to do so—either by action for libel or probably by intervention of Queen's Proctor" (February 22, 1886). And again on the same date: "As to Queen's Proctor on a new trial, pray consider all the possibilities. Whatever you decide I shall support, but I *incline* to think that the best course is to lie low and let the storm blow over." This disposes of another lingering whisper—that once more a rampageous though faithful Chamberlain overbore his weaker friend's truer instinct.

As the rehearing approached Dilke was sometimes very confident to Chamberlain's further happiness. But the method of moving the Queen's Proctor turned out to involve miserable disadvantages. It was legally ruled that Dilke, recognised as a

¹ Chamberlain to Dilke, March 1, 1886.

1886.

² W. T. Stead, "Deliverance or

³ Chamberlain to Dilke, April 22, Doom?" *Review of Reviews* Office, 1892.

witness only, could not be represented by his Counsel. Although Sir Henry James and Sir Charles Russell were there in court ready briefed, neither was allowed to speak.¹

CHAP.
XXVI.
Æt. 49-50.

Early in July at the General Election of 1886 on Home Rule, Dilke, as a Gladstonian, lost by only 176 votes, after a fine struggle, the Chelsea seat he had held for very nearly eighteen years through four Parliaments. The second trial then opened in mid-July. It was a catastrophe. For seven days the reports in the press were a flood of horrors. Mrs. Crawford, collected and deadly, pursued her purpose of dooming Dilke. On the whole other witnesses against him were more telling with judge and jury than those for him. On his side the key of the case still was lacking. Again X., the vital witness, was absent. It was impossible for Dilke to do what under the rules was imposed upon him now: to prove a negative—that he had not committed adultery with Mrs. Crawford. Against him the judge, Sir James Hannen, leaned heavily. The jury in a quarter of an hour found that the decision in the former trial “was not pronounced contrary to the justice of the case”.² The judge dismissed with costs the intervention of the Queen’s Proctor.

This was the end of Dilke’s career as a political leader rising towards the highest office in the State.

Of an ordeal of friendship it was not yet the end. The issue in court was heartrending enough for Chamberlain, who still held Mrs. Crawford’s account to be incredible in spite of its being “most damnably circumstantial”. There seemed peril of an affrighting sequel. On the morning after the close of the second trial *The Times*, in one of the most strongly worded and unsparing articles it ever printed, demanded in effect that Dilke should quit the country or face trial for perjury. At this, Dilke in his affliction stubbornly refused to run, and dared all consequences.

Chamberlain entreated:

I feel bitterly my powerlessness to say or do anything useful at the present time. . . . Your only hope now is that new evidence may come to light which will show the true nature of the conspiracy of which you have been the victim. . . . And surely it is better to await this chance

¹ Dilke’s *Life*, vol. ii. p. 175.

² *The Times* report, July 24, 1886.

at liberty and with such domestic happiness as may still be open to you, rather than to spend the time in the slow martyrdom of penal servitude. If you are free you can advise and consult and act whenever any favourable turn presents itself, and you and your wife can mutually support one another in this terrible trial.

In vain. His friend's obstinacy makes Chamberlain aghast and he implores again:

In a matter of such terrific moment to yourself no one has any right to question your decision, but I presume on our long friendship to give my opinion. I cannot see what duty is fulfilled or what interest served by facing a prosecution which I fear must come and which may end in a sentence of 7 or even 14 years penal servitude. . . . I do not understand why, being innocent but unable now to prove your innocence, you should go to prison and cut yourself off from the only compensations remaining to you. . . . It is a horrible business and I chafe at my powerlessness to render any effective help.¹

That nightmare passed away. In a few days more, Chamberlain reports: "I have the best reasons for knowing that the present Government [Lord Salisbury's administration just installed] are most unlikely to institute a prosecution for perjury".² This good news was true. When the threats of prosecution and penal servitude were removed, then and not before, Dilke left for Royat, as his wife's health demanded. Chamberlain's last word as they leave is, "I have had no regular holiday for three years and want to forget everything for a time".

VIII

This after so many years was the dark close of the old days between them. The former power of their dual alliance through half a decade of Ministerial comradeship had been wellnigh annulled for twelve months. Even the shadow of it had now and then some fitful influence up to the first trial but none afterwards.

There remains a piercing question.

If Chamberlain's heart was faultless in Dilke's cause, as

¹ Chamberlain to Dilke, July 30, 1886.

² Chamberlain to Dilke, August 5, 1886.

has been amply shown, was his judgment sound? Was his domination unwise and calamitous? Dilke, from the moment when he learned the drift of Mrs. Crawford's confession, had desired, as we saw, to disappear from political life and never again to return to the House of Commons. To his minute records and annotations he added this sentence: "Chamberlain over-persuaded Emilia and, through her, me, but he was wrong".¹

We see how gravely this remark might mislead if quoted by itself. When Chamberlain set himself, with Mrs. Pattison's aid, to raise his friend from helpless despair he was true to his own being. How could he be false to it? With the information he possessed, and the best judgment he could form, when he induced the stricken man to reappear in Parliament, he believed Dilke to be the victim of an "odious conspiracy". That the victim should surrender to it seemed to Chamberlain unthinkable. How could any other notion enter his mind? How could his letters to Mrs. Pattison have been more worthy of his head and his heart? Again, in the early autumn of 1885, when Dilke was married and hope was born again, neither Chamberlain nor any other adviser could foresee the length to which the accusers would go; nor the strange turn of the first trial; nor the devastating course of the second. How could he dream that the vital witness required for his friend's deliverance never would appear?

At Highbury in the August of 1885—when the stronger man with affection and devotion roused his ally to fight for acquittal—these things were beyond conjecture. And as these things were to be, Dilke's own foreboding instinct was right. Looking back now, we can see that it would have been the lesser evil for him, though at first desolating, had he, when Mr. Crawford refused once for all to desist from public proceedings, withdrawn from politics and given the rest of his life to literature. By that means he could have rebuilt by degrees another and a massive reputation. For years, as we saw, he hoped to write nothing less than a "History of the Nineteenth Century", and collected materials. In retirement he could have done it. He was of that calibre.

What might have been had the Radical alliance remained un-

¹ Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 167.

BOOK VI.
1885-86. impaired by private calamity and unbroken by political division has been already inferred in these pages. To pursue speculation further would be melancholy and profitless. Undoubtedly, had Chamberlain and Dilke been able to hold together on the old lines, they would have changed the course of all things in Britain and the British Empire and changed much in the world. Would they have held together? It is very possible; but as we shall see, when we come to the Home Rule struggle, it is not so sure.

Friendship remained, but colleagueship was gone. In public life a void on that side makes a vast difference between statesmen—whether they will or no—who have been the closest comrades. Correspondence unaltered in tone went on for many years but diminished in frequency and in personal interest. Lady Dilke, in her hopes and efforts for a long time to secure by new evidence her husband's triumph, was encouraged always by Chamberlain. In his diary we find the following note:

Tuesday, December 2, 1890.—Dilke called and in answer to his request I stated my views in favour of his accepting a candidature for Parliament.

In 1892, Dilke had some comfort in being elected by a constituency where a large majority believed in his innocence, and he returned to the House of Commons as member for the Forest of Dean. He did work of sound value, but never could regain office nor anything like his old command. His sequel was a long and mournful anticlimax. "Chamberlain and Dilke", once indissoluble in the public mind and in their own thoughts—through long years they looked across at each other from opposite sides of the House. Fate will not spare Chamberlain himself at the end of his public career, any more than at its beginnings. Several great tragedies, personal or political or both together, cross the pages of this biography. In a human sense Dilke's tragedy is the most terrible of all. When it happened he was only forty-two. One memory is the best. "Rare as is true love, true friendship is rarer."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE "UNAUTHORISED PROGRAMME"—TRIUMPH AND ANTICIPATION

(AUTUMN 1885)

TRAVERSING the Nation—An Extraordinary Effort—Hull and "Your Coming Prime Minister"—Warrington and the Defiance to Parnell—The Scottish Tour—The "Old Vic" and Bradford—He will reject Office without Radical Freedom—Scenes in Wiltshire—The Origin of "Three Acres and a Cow"—Spirit and Historic Effect of the Crusade—Was it Socialism?—A Tempest of Abuse—The Praise—Gladstone rivalled—"The Grand Old Man and the Grand Young Man".

I

CHAMBERLAIN had already thrown himself into the electoral turmoil when the parliament of 1880 was at last dissolved in mid-August 1885 by a Conservative Government. Hardly more than two months had passed since the Liberal Cabinet fell. To him those months seemed like years owing to what had happened to Dilke and what had happened with Parnell.

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

The Queen's speech dispersing the House of Commons was read to almost empty benches. Journals and reviews were full of serious reflection. The epoch of middle-class Liberalism had passed; the signposts pointed to democracy. While the *Spectator* saw in Parnell, Chamberlain and Churchill the men of the new time, the *Economist* said that during the late Parliament the new Radicalism had been born, with Chamberlain for its "most prominent exponent". As for Radicals, many were declaring with Labouchere that when Mr. Gladstone withdrew from public life, "his mantle will descend upon Mr. Chamberlain, who must be our next Premier". This was the sentiment of the working-class rank and file.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

His culminating campaign for the "unauthorised programme" had been planned, as we know, long in advance. Opened by what were called his "Ransom" speeches at the beginning of the year, it had been then abruptly suspended by the protests of the Whig Ministers. It was to be resumed without compromise now that he was free from the fetters of office. Through the summer he equipped himself with tireless application both to matter and form. He read hard, thought hard, made piles of notes in his minute hand, saturated himself with his subject, and visualised to himself in advance every stroke of delivery.

His brief was ready in *The Radical Programme*, a collection and revision of articles which for nearly two years had been running through the *Fortnightly Review*, then edited by Escott, who succeeded John Morley. Earlier pages have shown how Chamberlain organised the articles in collaboration with Escott, who were the writers, and how, as he said, he "knocked about" some contributors like Frank Harris. The volume, in a scarlet cover, was issued with a preface from his pen and had a wider vogue than any catechism of its kind in that age. He did not pledge himself to everything in it, but in the main it was his handbook. The preface ran:

The Reform Acts of 1885 have set the seal on the great change which the Reform Act of 1832 inaugurated.

The government of the people by the people, imperfectly recognised as the principle of the first attempt to improve the Parliamentary Representation, has been at last effectively secured by the two measures which together constitute the great achievement of Mr. Gladstone's second administration.

At last the majority of the nation will be represented by a majority of the House of Commons, and ideas and wants and claims which have been hitherto ignored in legislation will find a voice in Parliament, and will compel the attention of statesmen.

Radicalism, which has been the creed of the most numerous section of the Liberal party outside the House of Commons, will henceforth be a powerful factor inside the walls of the popular Chamber.

The stage of agitation has passed and the time for action has come.

There is need, therefore, for the attempt which is made in the following pages to compile a definite and practical programme for the Radical party.

It is a mistake to suppose that the objects of the advanced Liberals are simply destructive, for although the ground has to be cleared in many places, the new necessities of the time can only be fully met by constructive legislation.

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

New conceptions of public duty, new developments of social enterprise, new estimates of the natural obligations of the members of the community to one another, have come into view and demand consideration.

On this account, and without pledging myself to all the proposals contained in the following articles, I welcome their appearance, and commend them to the careful and impartial judgment of my fellow-countrymen.¹

Some weeks later he invited for the little book the earnest attention of the country and the fair consideration of his opponents. "I wish that some of those who on Tory platforms go about abusing their opponents without much knowledge would make themselves acquainted with the contents of that book. I do not suppose that they would agree with what it contains—they would not be Tories if they did—but at least they would see that there is nothing dangerous and nothing unconstitutional and nothing unjust in the great majority of the proposals made on behalf of the Radical party."² It is doubtful whether Conservatives who followed this advice and looked well into the volume found much ease. The editor's introduction, every word of it settled in agreement with the statesman, expressed very well the spirit of the proposals:

They sound the death-knell of the *laissez-faire* system. . . . The goal towards which the advance will probably be made at an accelerated pace is that in the direction of which the legislation of the last quarter of a century has been tending—the intervention, in other words, of the State on behalf of the weak against the strong, in the interests of labour against capital, of want and suffering against luxury and ease.³

These latter words went indeed to the heart of the matter. The spirit of the "unauthorised programme", far more than the

¹ *The Radical Programme*, with a preface by the Right Hon. J. Chamberlain, M.P. (London, Chapman and Hall, 1885.)

² Warrington, September 8, 1885.

³ *The Radical Programme*, Introduction, pp. 13, 17.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

letter, stirred the working classes in town and shire. The Caucus, then at the height of its power, promoted vigorously the circulation of "Chamberlain's red book". Mr. Gladstone was right when, six months before, he scented—and noted in his remarks to Lord Acton—an uncommon "method" in this campaign for "construction".

The Radical leader's oratorical tour was planned to traverse town and country from London and the southern shires to the Scottish Highlands—exceeding, both in range of movement and variety of theme, anything that an English statesman had yet attempted. What mental and other difficulties harassed his preparation, owing to his care of Dilke at Highbury, we have seen. Contrary to all he had hoped in June, his campaign would have to be single-handed while his ally was in the shadow. This very fact and its solemnity for him—as in a real sense we can say—may have given him the strength to which he rose. No man by taking pains can add a cubit to physical stature. Some men by taking pains can add cubits to moral stature. He pre-imagined the delivery of these speeches, just as he vitalised the substance in his mind, ordered the argument—a chief part of his skill—and sought a still more compressed clarity of utterance while giving a finer rhythm to sustained ardour of invocation. The design was ambitious, but the means proportioned and the result successful to a degree that astonished his nearest admirers as well as the nation at large. His voice itself improved. Losing none of its peculiarly virile accentuation, it acquired a fuller resonance.

At the height of the effort Harcourt wrote that Chamberlain had surpassed Bright in his best days or Gladstone in Midlothian. This is too hastily said of achievements so dissimilar in their kind, but the testimony to actual effect is true. There is ample evidence besides Harcourt's. Chamberlain's crusade came home to the bosoms and business of the common people like nothing for many a long year before or after. In the sight of the enlarged democracy or at least of its labouring masses he stood out more than ever as Mr. Gladstone's successor. The sooner, many of them thought, the better.

II

There was a prelude to the great round. As early as July 24, his speech at Hackney shone and cut. His audience revelled with him on the joyous theme that Liberal journalists called "Tory transformation". He coloured his genuine admiration of Lord Randolph to heighten his parody of that statesman's colleagues. As for Churchill—"Why, this man is doing in the heart of the Tory citadel, with the rarest audacity and courage, the work we have vainly attempted to do from outside. I admire, and I am amazed at, his courage and at his success." The Cabinet of Caretakers was meekly digesting Birmingham principles.

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

"It is a very pleasant and flattering recollection for me to think the Tory Government only exists to carry out my behests. I want to know how far they will go with me. If I denounce the State Church will they disestablish it? If I call for free schools will they abolish school fees?¹ If I condemn pensions will they relinquish their own? After the debate the other night a member of the House of Commons came up to me and said, 'My dear fellow, pray be careful in what you say, for if you were to speak disrespectfully of the Ten Commandments, I believe that Balfour would bring in a Bill immediately to repeal them'. . . . The Tories are now doing our work, but are you sure that if they were in a majority they would remain of the same mind?"

The full campaign opened with his appearance in an ancient and very individual town, the seaport of Hull. That visit (August 5 and 6) was heralded by demonstrations of a new kind in English politics. By the reception-committee, placards of an American magnitude were stretched out on the hoardings. These orange posters were yards long, and in gigantic black type they summoned the people to welcome "Your coming Prime Minister". The town seethed. Local shipping firms as well as local politicians and even the town's two members were divided on the question of profitable tragedy at sea.

The senior member, Norwood, was a Whig who had been amongst the stiffest enemies of the Shipping Bill. Him the Radicals of the old seafaring borough—an exceptionally zealous body—were determined to oust at any cost; and presently they

¹ This a Conservative Government would one day do at his "behest".

BOOK

VI.

1885.

did oust him by an open split, and the separate candidature of a local Bradlaugh, who polled enough to let in the Conservative. In advance they had much of the spirit of the Labour party to-day, but like the Chartists they looked back with a naive touch of English historical idealism and thought more of King Alfred than of Karl Marx.

In this seaport, where feeling ran so high, Chamberlain's speech on the life and the risk and the frequent fate of the ordinary seaman told his own story—a passage of frank autobiography. It was an effort that no man then living could excel. It should be read sometimes by any who forget or have never known how Joseph Chamberlain could speak.

I found in the first place that every year more than 3000 lives were lost at sea; that in some years this total amounted to 3500 and even more. Death is always a pathetic thing; but death when it comes under circumstances of such horror and when it comes in the shape of a violent end to existence, is still more tragic and pathetic. And it is not only the men whose lives were lost whose fate you have to consider. What is the fate of their families who are left without resource, struggling against destitution when the breadwinner is removed?

The next point which struck me was this, that the proportion of this loss of life to the men employed was something extravagant and almost horrible . . . actually 1 in 56. But what does it matter, whether it is 1 in 56 or 1 in 60 or 1 in 100? It is a loss of life absolutely unparalleled in any other trade, deplorable in itself, and which ought not to be endured by a civilised people.

Then I went on naturally to the next point of the enquiry. I tried to discover how far this loss of life was preventible. . . . I found the extraordinary fact that in a great number of cases, I am not certain that it might not be so in the majority of cases, the owners whose vessels went to the bottom, the bones of whose crews whitened the sands—these men suffered no loss and might even in some cases make a profit.

I thought that this was a state of things which loudly called for remedy. I for one was not prepared to take the responsibility of standing with folded hands doing nothing to remove a source of so much misery and suffering to so many of my fellow-countrymen.¹

Every word went home.

¹ Hull, August 6, 1885.

But at Hull this was not his principal speech. That delivered the day before was of a wider scope. It dealt with "the future of domestic legislation" and gave a broad view of future Radical policy.

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

He declared that there was a quickening of all political life in the country and that the pace of reform must be faster:

I have been solemnly excommunicated by some of the great authorities who claim a monopoly of the orthodox Liberal faith and doctrine. . . . I am told if I pursue this course that I shall break up the party and that I shall altogether destroy any chance which I might otherwise have had of office. I do not believe it. But if it were true I say that I care little for party and nothing at all for office, except so far as these things may be made instrumental in promoting the objects which I publicly avowed when I first entered Parliament and which I will prosecute so long as I remain in public life. . . . I had already a deep conviction that when the people came to govern themselves, and when the clamour of vested interests and class privileges was overborne by the powerful voice of the whole nation, that then the social evils which disgrace our civilisation, and the wrongs which have cried vainly for redress would at last find a hearing and a remedy.¹

Again:

I believe that the great difficulty with which we have to deal is the excessive inequality in the distribution of riches. Ignorance, intemperance, immorality and disease—these things are all interdependent and closely connected; and although they are often the cause of poverty, they are still more frequently the consequence of destitution. . . . It is not our duty, it is not our wish, to pull down and abase the rich, although I do not think that the excessive aggregation of wealth in a few hands is any advantage to anybody; but our object is to raise the general condition of the people.

As for specific proposals he laid most stress in this speech on free education; graduated taxation; and, above all, reform of the land laws. "The farmer is a difficult man to serve . . . he chooses to confide his interests to the landlords who represent him in Parliament, which is very much like, in the words of a homely proverb, setting the cat to guard the cream. . . . But when we

¹ Hull, August 5, 1885.

BOOK

VI.

1885.

come to the labourers the task is easier. They know what they want, which is the first condition for getting it. They require that facilities shall be afforded to them for having decent cottages and fair allotments at reasonable rents and with security of tenure. Why should they not have it? Who would be injured if they did have it?"

With humane and dangerous eloquence he could describe the realities of life and death amongst the seamen and their folk. Equally definite in stroke after stroke, and nearly as moving, was his account at Hull of the common life and fate of the rural labourers. He could do this because here again he had spared no pains to get at the facts first-hand. Just before, he had visited Wiltshire with his eyes open. He had seen thousands of acres of fertile land lying waste, choked with quitch, rank with weeds. The population all round was diminishing; the little traders in the villages found their customers dispersing; while the remaining labourers, deprived of reasonable access even to land left idle about them, were as wretchedly underpaid as the land was under-cultivated. How clearly he saw fifty years ago that this was the sphinx-riddle of the nation and its breed.

So at Hull he opened the campaign pursued with unrelaxed power.

III

Before the next appearance a month passed, and it changed some things for ever. As the German phrase puts it, "The word spoken, like the stone thrown, comes back no more". In Dublin on August 24 Parnell's speech was a challenge with a ring that echoed through Europe and further—through America and India and what we now call the Dominions. He claimed National Independence, and added a corrosive taunt. "It is not now a question of self-government for Ireland; it is only a question as to how much of self-government they will be able to cheat us out of."¹ The English press denounced him: *The Times* and *Telegraph* in unison with the *Daily News* and *Manchester Guardian*. Lord Hartington at Waterfoot,² with a broad honesty of negation, repudiated Irish Nationalism and English

¹ At Dublin. Barry O'Brien, *Parnell*, vol. ii. p. 98.

² August 29.

Radicalism together. Like many other moderates at that day, he suggested that the rights of property were the salvation of the poor. At this, the next speech of our unauthorised campaigner was awaited with tiptoed expectancy.

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

He made his reply at Warrington on September 8, and to such purpose that no single speech of the Victorian age—not one—was more charged with consequence. Uncompromising in essence, he showed studied verbal restraint except in one fling added to the catchwords of the day. He dealt faithfully both with the Whig leader and the Irish dictator.

Hartington he likened to Rip van Winkle. "There is not a single Liberal candidate who has not accepted some one or more points of the Radical programme. It is therefore perfectly futile and ridiculous for any political Rip van Winkle to come down from the mountains on which he has been slumbering, and to tell us that these things are to be excluded from the Liberal programme. The world has moved on while these dreamers have been sleeping." Then the Radical leader attacked what he called in one of the pithiest sentences of his whole crusade "the convenient cant of selfish wealth". Were that to be the Whig hymnal, then the schism must come between the resistent minority and the insistent majority of Liberalism. Perturbations in the party and cogitations at Hawarden caused by the following words must be dealt with in the next chapter.

If we cannot convince our allies of the justice and reasonableness of our views, then, with whatever reluctance, we must part company; we will fight alone; we will appeal unto Caesar; we will go to the people from whom we come and whose cause we plead; and, although the verdict may be delayed, I, for my part, have not one shadow of doubt as to the ultimate decision. We have been looking to the extension of the franchise in order to bring into prominence questions which have been too long neglected. The great problem of our civilisation is still unsolved. We have to account for and to grapple with the mass of misery and destitution in our midst, co-existent as it is with the evidence of abundant wealth and teeming prosperity. It is a problem which some men would put aside by references to the eternal laws of supply and demand, to the necessity of freedom of contract, and to the sanctity of every private right of property. But, gentlemen, these phrases are the convenient cant of selfish wealth.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

The searching of heart and conscience on that matter could no longer be stifled by the complacent verbiage of *laissez-faire*. So much for the Whigs.

He turned, on the other hand, to Parnell and confronted him with a will of steel. This answer is too long to be quoted yet too compact to be well abridged. Every measured sentence counts. Specimen phrases must suggest what cannot be summarised:

He [Parnell] says that in his opinion the time has come to abandon altogether all attempts to obtain further remedial measures or subsidiary reforms, and to concentrate the efforts of the Irish representatives upon the securing of a separate and independent Parliament, which is to consist of a single Chamber, and whose first object it will be to put a protective duty against all British manufactures. Then he says, in the second place, that he expects Whig and Tory will vie with one another in helping him to a settlement on his own terms; and he says, in the last place, that if any party seeks to make this object impossible, he and his friends will make all things impossible for them.

Well, gentlemen, I am not a Whig and I am certainly not a Tory. But speaking for myself, I say that if these, and these alone, are the terms on which Mr. Parnell's support is to be obtained, I will not enter into competition for it. This new programme of Mr. Parnell's involves a great extension of anything that we have hitherto understood by "Home Rule". The powers he claims for his separate Parliament are altogether beyond anything which exists in the case of the State Legislatures of the American Union, which has hitherto been the type and model of the Irish demands;¹ and if this claim were conceded, we might as well for ever abandon all hope of maintaining a United Kingdom. . . . I cannot admit that five millions of Irishmen have any greater inherent right to govern themselves without regard to the rest of the United Kingdom than the five million inhabitants of the metropolis. God has made us neighbours, and I would to heaven that our rulers had made us friends. But as neighbours neither one nor the other has any right so to rule his own household as to be a source of annoyance or danger to the other. Subject to that limitation, I for my part would concede the greatest

¹ He did not yet know that O'Shea had concealed Parnell's letters stating that the plan of a National Council

could only be a useful instalment without prejudice to the Irish demand for full national Home Rule.

measure of local government to the Irish people, as I would concede it also to the English and the Scotch.¹

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

In this fateful declaration towards Ireland, Chamberlain cast the die with a nerve no less iron than Parnell's. It was an irrevocable act. It was not rash but considered. It followed inevitably from Chamberlain's warnings through O'Shea a few weeks before, formally noting the rejection of the National Council project but refusing to bid higher for the Irish vote. A verdict adverse to Chamberlain might conceivably be founded by some judges on other and later considerations appearing presently in these pages. But how, after Warrington, can he be accused of untruth to his own self or of falseness to any man in his subsequent attitude towards the Gladstone-Parnell policy? This sort of charge is past the comprehension of any student of historical evidence who realises how Chamberlain, Parnell and Gladstone alike were irresistibly impelled by their own inmost minds. Dilke and Morley knew, what the whole Irish party felt by instinct, that in Parnell's sense Chamberlain was no Home Ruler. How often he had declared his Unionism readers of these pages are well aware. We shall have to return to this controversy. At this point it must be remembered that in the unauthorised campaigner's opinion Ireland ought to share progress equally with the rest of the United Kingdom; but should not dominate affairs nor monopolise sympathy. As he saw it, in the autumn of 1885, the grievances of the British masses in town and country, whether packed in squalid streets or hopelessly disinherited on the soil, were deeper than the grievances of Irish peasants, though less picturesque and articulate. Mr. Bernard Shaw in *John Bull's Other Island* makes the cockney valet explode with the same feeling, when he can no longer endure the assumption that in a sorrowful world the pathos of Ireland is unique.²

¹ The immediate impression of the Warrington speech on its audience was extraordinary and is described by Sir Edward Russell, who heard it: "Mr. Chamberlain achieved an oratorical as well as a dialectical triumph; seldom has a great public meeting enjoyed such a continuous flow of brilliant humour, of tender pathos, of passionate invective and of sweet entreaty as the great Radical leader poured forth to his delighted listeners. Mr.

Chamberlain is rapidly catching the Gladstonian secret of influence and popularity. . . . Only those who heard it can appreciate the magnetic influence of the orator."

² "Gawd! when I think of the things we Englishmen 'av to put up with . . . I just feel that I could take the oul bloomin' British awland and make you a present of it, just to let you find out wot real 'ardship's like' (Act III.).

IV

BOOK

VI.

1885.

Chamberlain turned to Scotland. For long he had set his whole heart on making that part of his campaign decisive in its appeal to democracy. The Scottish tour was not only a success, but a triumph such as no contemporary except Gladstone had won across the Border; or none at least since John Bright stood on his toes to deliver that celebrated opening sentence, "You have a Duke in these parts!" Chamberlain had not visited Glasgow for six years. When he reappeared¹ his personal following on the Clyde was stronger than anywhere else outside the Midlands. Scottish Radicalism, especially in Glasgow and its region, was profoundly stirred by Henry George and by the Irish agrarian movement, and was ready for any democratic proclamation.

His audience packed St. Andrew's Hall—thousands more had tried in vain for admission. He roused them to white-heat, as some still living well remember. They thought a new age of social politics had begun that day. John Morley and other good judges were right when they said that on the whole the Glasgow effort was the top notch. It was a magnificent speech. Tackling first a thorny matter—disestablishment in Scotland—to get it out of the way, he maintained with skill and irony that it was not the suitable business of governments and parliaments to deal with theological relativities of truth and error. "I am an English Nonconformist—born and bred in dissent—and I am opposed from honest conviction to anything in the nature of State interference with, or State aid to, religion. . . . For political as well as for social reasons, and in the interest of religion itself, I am a Liberationist. I would free the Church from State control whether in England, in Scotland, or in Wales." Yet let not that ideal become prematurely the cause of Liberal divisions and Tory gain. There was a more immediate issue—the democratic issue—how "to raise the general condition of the people".

Hitherto, he could only lay his views before a limited elec-

¹ "The last time I had the pleasure of visiting Glasgow was almost exactly six years ago, and the circumstances were in some respects similar to the present. Then also we had the advan-

tage of being governed by a Tory Ministry, and then also we were on the eve of a General Election, which was to rid us of them for some considerable time."

torate. "Now I submit them to the whole people of the country, and now for the first time they have the power, if they are so minded, to give to them executive force and authority." CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

Then he passed to his main theme. It was the simplest—"Rich and Poor". He pictured the glaring contrasts—unexampled accumulation of national wealth, and scenes of social squalor where one in ten among the people were always on the verge of starvation. The rise of the working masses to more civilised conditions of life must no longer merely be prayed for; it must be organised. Organised definitely, continuously in town and country—"as in Birmingham". Organised by the extension of local government, equipped above all with power to acquire land for public purposes at a fair price:

What is the object of this political struggle to which so many of us are giving our time, our labour, our money, and sometimes our health and our lives? If you are to believe some persons, it is a very poor and paltry business; it is a mere contest between the kites and the crows, a poor contention for place and power, animated by the basest and most unworthy motives. I suppose that those who are ready to attribute this meanness to their opponents must feel that under other circumstances they could be guilty of it themselves. But I am glad to believe that the majority of public men in Great Britain are animated by nobler and more worthy objects.

Politics is the science of human happiness, and the business of a statesman and of politicians is to find out how they can raise the general condition of the people; how they can increase the happiness of those who are less fortunate among them. What are the facts of the case? I sometimes think that we are so used to poverty and to its consequences that we forget it or neglect it. Yet surely there is some reason to doubt the perfection of our system when in this, the richest country in the world, one in thirty of the population at every moment are unable to obtain the means of subsistence without recourse to the parish, and one in ten at the same time are on the verge of starvation.

From that, he spoke of Ireland again in the terms of the Warrington speech, maintaining that the plan of National Councils for the four divisions of the United Kingdom was the sound policy looking to effective devolution, to reasonable scope for differences of national sentiment, and to relief of the central

BOOK
VI.
1885.

parliamentary machine, while maintaining unity unimpaired in matters of Imperial moment. All this would conduce to solve or largely ameliorate the social question:

For my part neither sneers, nor abuse, nor opposition, shall induce me to accept as the will of the Almighty and the unalterable dispensation of His providence a state of things under which millions lead sordid, hopeless and monotonous lives without pleasure in the present and without prospect for the future. The issue is for you and for the new constituencies.¹

Thence, after a free day in Rob Roy's country—an apt recreation, said Conservatives—he went, “by far Loch Ard and Aberfoyle”, to Inverness.² There, stirred apparently by the scenes of nature and the lot of humanity, he made his most passionate speech of the campaign. He idealised no doubt the days of patriarchal chieftainship when all had their share in clan-right. With this he contrasted modern “ownership” as an inhuman mechanism. He dwelt on seizures, clearances, exactions, evictions, deer forests, and the effect of agrarian depopulation in creating coagulated poverty in towns. This appeal to Highland spirit was sustained with intense force, descriptive mastery, steady emotion, as a passage or two may show:

The history of the Highland clearances is a black page in the account with private ownership in land, and if it were to form a precedent, if there could be any precedent for wrong-doing, if the sins of the fathers ought to be visited upon the children, we should have an excuse for more drastic legislation than any which the wildest reformer has ever proposed. Thousands of industrious, hard-working, God-fearing people were driven from the lands which had belonged to their ancestors, and which for generations they had cultivated; their houses were unroofed and destroyed, they were turned out homeless and forlorn, exposed to

¹ Glasgow, September 15, 1885.

² Professor John Stuart Blackie was stirred by the Inverness speech to write enthusiastic verses in the

Pall Mall Gazette. They help to recall again something of the apocalyptic fervours of that hour amongst Radical politicians:

“I have now at last a MAN! I've waited long
With deaf ear turned to Whig and Tory babble . . .
But this man, with unbribed, unblinking sense,
Shoots to the mark. . . .
. . . my doubting days are done;
Truth must prevail though all the vents of hell
Shall spit their sulphurous fumes to blind the sun.”

the inclemency of the winter-season, left to perish on the hillsides or to swell the full flood of misery and destitution in the cities to which they were driven for refuge. . . .

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

I ask you whether it is not time that we should submit to careful examination and review a system which places such vast powers for evil in the hands of irresponsible individuals and which makes the possession of land not a trust but a means of extortion and exaction.

Let us look this fetish in the face; let us examine these sacred rights of property; let us see upon what they are founded; and let us see whether there ought not to be some limitation to the exorbitant pretensions with which they have been accompanied. I believe at the present time two-thirds of the land of Scotland is held by 330 proprietors. . . . I have sometimes speculated upon what would have happened in this country if it had been possible to establish private property in air. . . .

I read the other day in a circular issued by the Scottish Rights of Way Association that within very recent years many valuable public rights had been lost beyond recovery. Lost! Gentlemen, do you not think that is a very mild way of putting it? But why beyond recovery? I hope that the people will never admit that doctrine so dear to pilferers of every class that a theft is to be condoned because it escapes detection at the time.¹

He would lay a special tax on deer forests to discourage them. For his part the drastic principles of legislation for Irish benefit he would adapt—not copy—to uplift the Scottish crofters.

The singular fire of this speech lost nothing when he turned to free education. He gave instances of painful endeavour to pay the fees or more painful inability. "I know this also—that in every case where a free school has been established, or in which the fees previously charged have been diminished, the attendance has proportionately increased. I cannot rest until I see this cruel and abominable tax abolished and until every national school is free throughout the length and breadth of the land." There we perceive how the Radical leader on the education question is still saturated by his human experience and feeling in early Birmingham days. His command of the Scottish colour was remarked. To obtain it, as his note-books show, his reading had gone back as far as Pennant's *Voyage to*

¹ Inverness, September 18, 1885.

BOOK
VI.

1885.

the Hebrides in 1772; and he had made minute enquiries about various localities and estates. Awakening purpose and energy wherever he came, he knew how to agitate.

V

The following week he was in London again, and there left his mark on many memories. John Morley presided at the "Old Vic" theatre, densely crowded. To the topmost gallery the place was crammed, and outside were large crowds in Waterloo Road. The theatre, accommodating about 4000 persons, was packed for upwards of an hour before the meeting began.

Many members of parliament and candidates for metropolitan constituencies were seen vainly pushing into the throng. It would appear that many more tickets were issued than could be accommodated in the theatre, and many ticket-holders were obliged to abandon all attempts at gaining admission. Mr. Morley and Mr. Chamberlain had themselves great difficulty, under the guidance of the police, in obtaining entrance into the building.¹

An excellent witness gives this account:

The popular agitator was greeted with the most fervent cheers. He was a conquering hero. Fresh from his tour in Scotland, he looked full of vigour and confidence; his voice surprised some of those who had heard it only a few months previously. It displayed a richness and variety of tone of which many persons had considered it incapable.²

At this meeting he insisted that, to begin with at least, three points of the Radical programme must be adopted or tolerated by the Liberal party: (1) fairer taxation; (2) free schools; (3) the power of local authorities everywhere to acquire land at its fair value for allotments, small holdings and other purposes. So far, however admirable the delivery, the doctrine was familiar and its expression not novel.

But for another reason this speech in its effect upon the Liberal party, then subject almost daily to seismic tremors and heavings, was like an ominous sort of mild earthquake, which

¹ *The Times*, September 25, 1885.

² Alexander Mackintosh, *Joseph Chamberlain; an Honest Biography*, p. 112.

for aught anybody knows may be followed by violent shock. Chamberlain explained what would be his personal position should his party be called upon to form another Government. He would not join any Liberal Ministry positively excluding from its programme the three points mentioned above. Never again would he allow his advocacy of this minimum of Radicalism to be hampered by official restraints imposed to soothe the Whigs. As in the spring of 1880, but with more intent, he wanted in his heart to stand out of any Cabinet that Gladstone was likely to form. He preferred freedom to fetters:

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

These are the proposals, simple, moderate and practical, which I have recently been propounding in the country, and which have earned for me from Lord Iddesleigh the title of Jack Cade. . . . If I am right these views will find adequate expression, and they will receive due weight and attention from the party leaders. If I am disappointed then my course is clear. I cannot press the views of the minority against the conclusions of the majority of the party, but it would be, on the other hand, dishonourable in me, and lowering the high tone which ought to prevail in public life, if I, having committed myself personally, as I have done, to the expediency of these proposals, were to take my place in any Government which excluded them from its programme.

In that case it will be my duty to stand aside, and to lend a loyal support to those who are carrying out reforms with which I agree, although they are unable to go with me a little further. The sacrifice will not be one of very great merit, for I have not found official life so free from care that I should be unwilling once more to fall back into the ranks, and in a humbler position, to lend what support I can to the common cause.¹

This was called the "ultimatum speech". We shall have to come back to it in the next chapter, explaining how private relations in these months were conducted behind the public scenes. The ultimatum dropped at the moment like a bombshell. What now would be the fate of any mixed Liberal-Whig administration like the last were the Radical leader not of its company but upon its flank? Later, John Morley, chairman over the crowd at the "Old Vic", called the ultimatum "melodramatic". At the moment he seems wholly to approve, and comments next morn-

¹ Speech at Victoria Hall, London, September 24, 1885.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

ing: "As a demonstration last night was good; as a meeting bad.¹ Your burning of boats will make a stir. I'm heartily glad of it. Don't let us have the last five years over again." But Morley at heart was much more akin to the old philosophic Radicals, more eager for "liberation" than "construction". Between him and his friend, though neither recognised it yet, there were already deep disaffinities of political feeling.

By contrast Labouchere, much more closely in touch than Morley with the working temper of advanced Radicalism, was transported by Chamberlain's "Old Vic" ultimatum to the Whigs. At last there was a King in Israel.

Mr. Chamberlain's speech last week at the Victoria Hall is by far the most important contribution to electoral politics which has been forthcoming of late. . . . The Radical leader has nailed his colours to the mast. Those who are not with him are against him. I observe with pleasure that Sir William Harcourt has already made his choice. He regards Mr. Chamberlain as the coming man. Mr. Chamberlain's advent to power may be regarded as certain. He has at various times declared himself for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church, for the abolition of the House of Lords, against further Royal Grants, for local self-government in its widest sense, for limitation of landed estates; for the taxation of ground landlords in towns, and for state aid and interference in behalf of the weak against the strong, and he has shown that these are not vague words destined to catch votes, but are views that he is not inclined to surrender for place or power.²

What the "ultimatum speech" meant in essence was that the real struggle between Chamberlain's will and Gladstone's will had begun.

VI

Traversing the country, Chamberlain the next week finds himself again in Yorkshire, where with fresh force he addresses Bradford. He has replenished his quiver, and comes with a fresh stock of barbed phrases. "The House of Lords has always been the obsequious handmaid of the Tory party, and when a Con-

¹ This seems to refer to the overcrowding, the over-issue of tickets, and friction about the failure of mem-

bers, candidates and others to obtain admission despite their tickets,
² *Truth*, October 1, 1885.

servative Government is driven by party exigencies to promote a Radical programme, the Peers at once develop popular instincts and an unsuspected alacrity in promoting Radical doctrines." On the whole, what of Lord Salisbury's administration without a majority? They were "painstaking scholars. But they have no natural gifts. They learn by rote not by heart. They make good servants, but they would be bad masters." Then what of the choice for the nation at the polls next month? "I have been north and south, east and west, and everywhere I have met with a welcome which has surprised as well as touched me. . . . In preaching, as I have lately done, the gospel of political humanity I have reached the heart and the conscience of the nation."

CHAP.
XXVII.
ÆT. 49.

The poor were patient. "But their resignation ought not to blind us to their claims." Here, too, he advocates land for the labourers and "Merry England" again.

Then he came back to his theme at the "Old Vic"—rejection of office were his convictions vetoed as the price of Whig-Liberal unity. At first he had been accused of exorbitant ambitions. Now he was scolded and threatened for an insubordinate refusal to sacrifice principle for place. "I am told that in so doing I make it impossible that I should ever again be called upon to serve the country. I imagine that is a decision which will rest with a higher tribunal than the editors of London newspapers. But in any case, office for me has no attractions unless it may be made to serve the cause I have undertaken to promote, and if that reward is denied me, or is beyond my grasp, I will be content to leave to others the spoils of victory."¹

In mid-October he closed his crusade at Trowbridge amongst the rural labourers themselves. Nowhere had he met a more whole-hearted gathering. Wooden galleries had been put up in the market-house, filled long before the speaking began. Large numbers had come by special and ordinary trains from all parts of Wiltshire and neighbouring shires. This was the first great meeting of workers on the soil that he had ever addressed.

Lord Salisbury had caricatured him just before as an "inveterate Cockney" attempting an agricultural crusade. The Conservative leader seemed to think it more natural for some

¹ Bradford, October 1, 1885,

BOOK

VI.

1885.

men to own many thousands of acres than for Hodge to own none. Chamberlain gave as good as he got. He retorted in effect that if Lord Salisbury and his class supposed they were the only people who knew anything about land and rural life, that, perhaps, might account for the plight of both. What of the labourers? "The source of all the mischief lies in the system by which they have been divorced from the soil. The only remedy is to be found in the reform which will once more restore them to the land. Only by this means shall we be able to raise the position of the agricultural labourer and gratify that heaven-implemented craving in every labourer's heart to have some closer and more direct connection with the land which his labour has made productive." From the point of view of public credit, he defended cogently the financial as well as social soundness of compulsory purchase of land at a fair price by local authorities for the creation of small holdings.

Conservative Ministers were soon talking very like the "inveterate Cockney" about decent cottages and gardens and allotments at a fair charge.

The hit of the Trowbridge speech had nothing to do with the agricultural argument. It was a personal quip worthy of Disraeli, and amused all the nation, the victim included. "Mr. Goschen says that he has been told to stand aside. I do not know by whom—not by me. We cannot spare him. He performs in the Liberal party the useful part of the skeleton at Egyptian feasts. He is there to repress our enthusiasm and to moderate our joy."¹

Mr. J. A. Spender has given us one of the best reminiscences of those days:

Townsman though he might be, Mr. Chamberlain easily held his own with the best brains of the countryside. . . . The present writer had the good fortune, when still an undergraduate at Oxford, to accompany Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Jesse Collings on a tour of inspection through one of the poorest districts of Wiltshire, and he remembers vividly the keen interest and zest which Mr. Chamberlain threw into his talks with labourers and small farmers. The raw material gathered in this and similar tours was used with admirable effect in the

¹ Trowbridge, October 14, 1885.

speeches at Hull and Trowbridge a few weeks later; and though rural experts looked with eagle eyes for lapses in knowledge, they failed to discover them. . . . I had the good fortune to hear several of his most important speeches during the year 1885. He had not yet quite the restraint and self-confidence of later years; his manner was more youthful and emphatic. But then as later one felt the charm of the clear low voice and of that expressive lack of expression in the face, which yielded only to a faint smile or slight curl of the lip as the trenchant sentence drew to its extremely pointed conclusion. The sting was always in the tail of Mr. Chamberlain's sentences.¹

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

This present book seeks to portray a man in action, and there is little room for disquisition. But here must come some attempt to ascertain and fix the meaning of this series of speeches. For continuous power of exposition and incitement there has been nothing like them since, on the side of Liberalism or Labour.

VII

The schematic part of the examination is simple enough. The "unauthorised programme" in its full scope, taking the further with the nearer issues, contains seven principal propositions:

- (1) Free primary education;
- (2) Full local government for the counties;
- (3) Home-Rule-All-Round, on equal terms for the different nationalities of the United Kingdom, leaving the Imperial Parliament unimpaired in composition and authority as the supreme legislature of a common realm;
- (4) Financial reform, partly by graduated taxation, moderately applied—through death duties and house duties, not income-tax—partly by levying on unearned increment, in order to lighten the pressure of indirect taxation on the people and to pay for better housing and other social measures;
- (5) Land reform, chiefly to give the labourer a stake in the soil and to create again a race of small-holders—not excluding larger holdings — by the steady action of local authorities

¹ "Mr. Chamberlain as a Radical", and pp. 104-105. (Associated News in a capital little book, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, by various writers, p. 93 papers.)

BOOK VI. equipped with compulsory powers for land-purchase at an equitable price;

1885.

(6) Disestablishment of State Churches in England, Scotland and Wales;

(7) Manhood suffrage and payment of members.

To many of the possessing classes in that easy age all this seemed to be not merely inflammatory but incendiary—the torch-waving of a Jacobin. As usual, his extremism of that day became the commonplace of the future. He had started a movement not for long to be withstood by any party. Free education and County Councils were conceded presently from the unexpected quarter. Legislation to provide allotments and small holdings came gradually through the rest of his lifetime, though not as it would have come had he been a Radical Prime Minister with a strong majority. He contemplated breaking up large estates so far as necessary to give the labourer a stake in the soil. Never on that line nor on any other has the greatest object of national policy been consecutively pursued since his time. Of reviving the agricultural breed and doubling the production of our soil, the second quarter of the twentieth century finds us still talking and may leave us talking.

Direct and graduated taxation for the provision of social services at the expense of the majority has gone far beyond his own reasonable dreams and beyond what he thought the unreasonable fears of his critics. His very favourite doctrine of taxing “unearned increment”, so hard sometimes to distinguish from “undeserved detriment”, has proved more difficult to define and apply; but the idea has never passed out of politics. Payment of members became law long ago. We have arrived not only at manhood suffrage but at “universal suffrage” from the age of twenty-one upwards irrespective of sex.

On social reform generally Chamberlain was altogether prophetic in instinct. As its pioneer in action he was as effectual as circumstances permitted after the disruption of Liberalism and Radicalism—an impending ruin not yet conceivable by our advocate of the “unauthorised programme”. So mainly is he concentrated upon the “condition of the people” of Great Britain in town and country and upon his vision of the imminent new era of organised democracy.

Two articles of his creed proved impossible. About English disestablishment he was equally sanguine and obstinate. Already it was a lost cause, as in a very few months he would find. The new democracy, Gallio-like, would not care much for these things. Final had been the defeat of political Nonconformity in the hot battle of his youth for common schools of a single type. Likewise his plan of "Home-Rule-All-Round", with a Federal Parliament for the United Kingdom, was to be shattered in a few weeks by Mr. Gladstone's more one-sided and convulsive policy.

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

VIII

But if we dwell too much on the schematic side—the enumerated proposals and methodical details of the "unauthorised campaign"—we miss the secret of its awakening power and enduring influence. The power was not in the letter but in the spirit. He conjured up a new democratic vision and breathed a new hope; he kindled imagination by his projected realism as other men do by glowing metaphor. Remember his keynote—"How to promote the greater happiness of the mass of the people; how to increase their enjoyment of life—that is the problem of the future".¹ Not a poetic man, yet full of practical imagination, he appeared to many to be the executor of Blake's dream—one that would not rest, nor let others rest, "till we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land". Men then very young can recollect how bright was the dream. "It seemed to us in our blindness", says a contemporary, "that the Millennium was at hand."²

No effort so comprehensive could be exempt from flaws, but sometimes when his expression was incautious his meaning was what the mass of men felt to be true. By "natural rights", a phrase easily torn by philosophers, and they pounced upon it with beak and claw, he meant moral rights—the rising claims of the working classes to a civilised existence. "Ransom" was a bad word, but it meant in its time a good and inevitable thing. It did not mean "taxing the rich for being rich", as Labouchere liked to put it, but that the comfortable, for the enjoyment of

¹ Birmingham, January 5, 1885.

² Tuckwell, *Reminiscences of a Radical Parson*, p. 51.

BOOK VI. their peace and profits, should pay more than then they did to alleviate the general lot.

1885. The beginnings of the British Labour party may easily be traced to the "unauthorised campaign".

IX

Then was it Socialism? Many have tried to turn one of his own quick sentences into a man-trap for him. He said at Warrington: "Of course it is Socialism". But of course it was not. Not in the least according to any definition of the term or catechism of the doctrine. It is frivolous logomachy to argue otherwise. Even at Warrington he went on at once to show what he meant. "The Poor Law is Socialism; the Education Act is Socialism; the greater part of municipal work is Socialism; and every kindly act of legislation by which the community has sought to discharge its responsibilities and obligations to the poor is Socialism." These things have nothing to do—any more than the Post Office—with the principle of abolishing private capitalism and replacing it by public ownership. Sir William Harcourt jested: "We are all Socialists now". This shows best how vaguely these terms were used, by Liberals with sentiment and by Conservatives with horror, in the England of that generation.

But the answer does not end there. At the very outset of his campaign Chamberlain had settled this question by an explicit declaration. "Considering the difference in the character and capacity of men, I do not believe that there can ever be an absolute equality of conditions, and I think that nothing would be more undesirable than that we should remove the stimulus to industry and thrift and exertion which is afforded by the security given to every man in the enjoyment of the fruits of his own individual exertions. I am opposed to confiscation in every shape and form, because I believe that it would destroy that security and lessen that stimulus."¹ He said repeatedly that he understood "graduated taxation" as a fair principle much as Mr. Gladstone understood it. In the ways already explained he would have carried it further; but to apply it systematically against wealth and capital in a spirit of class-warfare never

¹ Hull, August 5, 1885.

entered his head. "I have claimed a revision of taxation in order to remove inequalities which now in my opinion rest unjustly upon the mass of the necessitous classes."¹

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

Individual enterprise and faith in it were in the blood of his origin and were the breath of his own being; he never dreamed of superseding the capitalist system in trade. But with regard to what belongs to another sphere altogether, life itself, not trade, he did utterly believe in "a social conscience" and in the systematic improvement of social conditions by the action of public authority.

Land was his exception to the rule. In Great Britain, where the ownership of the whole soil rested in the hands of a few, he held land to constitute in effect a unique, and largely misused, monopoly which ought to be brought under public regulation and control. Public ownership, obtained by fair though compulsory purchase, he contemplated to the fullest degree required for the restoration of the breed of small cultivators and for giving a birthright again to Hodge the disinherited—*desdichado* like Ivanhoe. Stirred by the spirit, rejecting the dogma, of Henry George's *jehad* against landlordism, he often pointed out that his ideal, a new race of yeomen, was the opposite of land nationalisation.

Strange to say, the potent catchword of the electioneering campaign in the counties was not of his devising. By all the ironies it was a Conservative, Mr. Edward Stanhope, who did his party disastrous disservice by asserting that Radical policy meant "promising to every labourer three acres and a cow". Like the nickname of "les Gueux" in Flanders, it was "flung out as a reproach and caught up as a battle-cry" by the newly enfranchised labourers. The pathos and delusion were not Chamberlain's making nor his fault, but in spite of himself a Conservative phrase helped the "inveterate Cockney" to sweep the shires when Conservatives on patriotic and Imperial cries were carrying the boroughs.

X

In three months the Radical leader had reaped the ample reward of all his tireless husbandry during two years; and like-

¹ Bradford, October 1, 1885.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

wise was paying the penalties of success. He stood out in Great Britain as the most formidable of personalities—next, as yet, to Gladstone.

On the other hand, he was inordinately abused. Always, since 1870, he had been plentifully abused, and often fully provoked it. Now with Irish vituperation in full cry on his track, while Conservative invective and Whig censure hurtled about his head, he began to be the most abused man in the whole world. Began to be; for the climax in that kind had yet to come, though it was near. He made this situation worse by having no expansive pathos. The speeches we have just followed, like so many other things in these pages, have revealed his sound nature; but he could not exploit it in public, whereas a whole nation is never so surely melted as when occasionally the heart is shown upon the sleeve.

No longer was it adequate to term him Robespierre, much less Girondist. It was the mildest of Conservative patriarchs, Lord Iddesleigh—not Lord Salisbury, as is often supposed—who called Chamberlain “Jack Cade”. Lord Salisbury did not call him anything more opprobrious than a “Sicilian bandit”. Likening him to Jack Sheppard and Dick Turpin was common form for the Conservative press and platform. He was a Communist, an anarchist. He was that mad and bad Ephesian who would burn down our temple to earn a name. The Parnellite press loaded him with obloquy. The Sovereign was more and more resolved never again to have him as a Minister of hers. At this phase “the Egyptian skeleton” and “Rip van Winkle” were her favoured statesmen. Queen Victoria did not foresee the coming change in her sentiments, nor could guess what that dreadful Mr. Gladstone was shrouding in the recesses of his mind.

Yet for all this the reviled agitator had compensation ample and overflowing. He was the idol of millions and the delight of the friends whose highest hopes he had far exceeded. Tribute on tribute of enthusiasm flowed to him.

CHAMBERLAIN AND HIS FRIENDS (Autumn 1885)

September 18.—From Dilke.—Congratulations on the Inverness speech, which I put between Warrington and Glasgow in merit. I don't think it

comes up to Warrington, but I don't think anybody living can come up to Warrington—not even yourself. Glasgow was as good as usual, which is saying a good deal.

CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

September 19.—From Morley.—By this time you will be drawing homeward from your royal progress. It has evidently been a splendid success, both solid and glittering. I congratulate you *de tout mon cœur*. The Glasgow speech appears to me to have been much the best—the strongest and most persuasive—that you ever made. The whole affair has advanced Radicalism into a new position . . . a thousand congratulations.

September 20.—Hartington to Goschen.—Chamberlain's last speeches are I think very able, and he has the advantage over us of greater definiteness in his programme.¹

September 21.—From Dr. Dale.—I congratulate you very heartily on your recent speeches in the north; apart from the substance of them which was admirable, the *form*—in which I include all the rhetorical elements—reached a level which I think you never touched before, and which I hope you will keep. It is a great thing for a man to make an advance of this kind when he has touched fifty.² This criticism is rather presumptuous for a person like myself to offer to an ex-Cabinet minister, but the delight one has in watching the growing strength of one's comrades remains when a comrade has become a chief, and when one has lost the right to speak to him in this way.

September 24.—From Harcourt.—You must allow me without flattery to say that I consider your performances of the most first-rate kind. You have far surpassed anything you had done before not only in rhetorical ability but in political force. You have conquered a position of vantage from which you can never be displaced. I think your Warrington, Glasgow and Inverness speeches are beyond anything that Bright did in his best days or the G.O.M. in Midlothian. The more the Tories abuse you the stronger you are and will be.

Government House, Madras, October 5.—From Grant Duff.—It seems to me that you have got far above the point, on the way to the summits of political power, where you have any right to be *intransigent*. You bring to the councils of the empire what no one else brings. You are

¹ Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. p. 73.

² He did not turn fifty until July

8, 1886, and before then things unimaginable were to happen.

BOOK

VI.

1885

the first municipal statesman that ever was in England. It is a high distinction, for Pericles was a municipal statesman. . . .

October 15.—From Dilke.—Hearty congratulations on your magnificent speech [at Trowbridge].

October 18.—From Labouchere.—Here [London] you are first and the rest nowhere. . . . You have to get up a cheer for the G.O.M. by dwelling on his noble heart and that sort of trash.

November 5.—From Dilke.—I had the whole party at the banquet last night . . . 10s. tickets and wine. Yet these rich moderate men would not cheer Goschen, and cheered you far more than they cheered Mr. G. himself.

November 25.—From Labouchere.—Even Gladstone's name goes for little at public meetings. Yours is the only one which makes anyone stand up and cheer.

We must complete our impressions of this phase if we are to understand what ensued. Mr. Augustine Birrell says of the Glasgow speech, that "its power of incitement was unrivalled; it had a thrilling sort of wickedness".¹ Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, since thrice Prime Minister, has described how Radical Scotland felt itself captained and marching.

I still remember as though it were but yesterday the thrill of pleasure which went through Radical Scotland when the first speech was delivered. Its bold audacity struck the imagination of the country. We waited with interest and at a high tension for the Inverness pronouncement. The earnest candour of the man . . . touched the imagination of Radical Scotland. . . . People flocked to the town [Inverness] from far and near—and they were rewarded. Never was the crofter position better put. He reiterated his doctrines about land-ownership. A volcano of fury shot up next morning from the Conservative press, but thousands of hearts were stirred for the coming contest by the joy that at last a man had appeared who really meant business.²

And as the speeches of this autumn campaign by their essence and form alike inspired an unknown young Scotsman one day to be Prime Minister, they inspired no less an unknown

¹ In conversation with the present writer.

² Ramsay MacDonald on "Chamberlain as a Social Reformer" in *Life*

of Joseph Chamberlain, by various writers, pp. 164-166. (Associated Newspapers.)

young Welshman destined to reach the same summit. At this time "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was Mr. Lloyd George's great hero. . . . Chamberlain, I often heard him say, was his ideal."¹ CHAP.
XXVII.
Æt. 49.

Mr. Tuckwell, the Radical parson, says that at many meetings in town and country "I found of late that if audiences cheered Gladstone's name for two minutes, they cheered Chamberlain's for five".² Another witness, the late Mr. T. P. O'Connor, records that in this mid-autumn Chamberlain's was "a name to conjure with more powerful than Mr. Gladstone's. For every cheer raised for the leader, three were given for the daring Radical lieutenant."

To the veteran, autocratic at heart, however consummately schooled in the courtesies, this apparition of rivalry could not be agreeable; and his entourage were bound to regard it as sacrilege before usurpation.

XI

This personal matter Chamberlain had not intended to raise. It occupied no large place in his thoughts, too positively engaged otherwise—engrossed by Radicalism and by the idea of democracy "with executive force and authority". He said at Warrington: "The great agitation which has set the seal upon popular government in this country is the work of the Radical party, which now constitutes the great majority of the Liberal party, and the 'arm-chair' politicians who looked on with indifference while we were bearing the heat and burthen of the day have no claim, and they have no power, to deprive us of the fruits of victory". Without guarantees for Radicalism he would not again serve under Gladstone or anyone.

But Gladstone was Merlin who "followed the gleam". Merlin was near his seventy-seventh year, and had repeated a hundred times since 1880 his intimations of vanishment. With much respect, but without much attention or amenity—and this may well seem a fault in prudence, yet how could he combine prudence and daring, and could anything make his type of politics other than antipathetic to Hawarden?—the Radical

¹ Remarks of a friend quoted in *Life of Lloyd George*, by J. Hugh Edwards, vol. ii. p. 141.

² *Reminiscences of a Radical Parson*, p. 59.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

leader assumed as a matter of course that Gladstone, out of sympathy with the constructive needs of the new generation, or little interested in them, was the august survivor of the past and that he, Chamberlain, was the man of the opening era.

To solve the Irish Question, direst of Imperial problems, Merlin at Hawarden meditates a magical stroke should one particular opportunity offer. Incidentally, the manner of the stroke will deprive the Radical programme and Highbury of their premature pretensions. This must have been considered amongst the other regards of a circumspection so comprehensive and vigilant as Gladstone's. Not only does he see the British "social question" as secondary by comparison with the Irish Question. He is hostile to the Radical programme and not quite benevolent in his inmost heart towards the younger leader. There is mutual misconception, mutual under-estimate, and this leads to irreconcilable antagonism.

The small things were not determining as petty gossips assert according to their kind—there was a sterner fate in it. Yet small things, as always, had their influence. If Chamberlain during this critical time seemed to fail in tact by nature or to reject it on principle, we must recollect two considerations. First, the differences of idea and temperament were profound; plummet could not drop deeper. Second, the Radical leader was working day and night. He simply had no time for calculated ingratiating, even were it compatible with his launched course. His correspondence became an almost intolerable load, added to the preparation devoted to his speeches. Every week he had to refuse over twenty urgent invitations from all over the land to address great meetings of adherents ready to foregather. The wonder is that he was not consumed.

He brought new life into politics and was the pioneer of the modern age in home affairs, as he would yet be in wider matters. The epilogue of his Radical crusade was delivered amongst his own people. He summed up:

Everywhere in the counties there is a great awakening; there is enthusiasm, expectation and hope. When I was in Wiltshire the other day, a gentleman told me that he had attended a meeting of Wiltshire labourers, and he was surprised by the quickness and intelligence with which they followed the speakers; and he said to a man who was standing

by him, "How is it that these labourers understand politics so well?" "Oh," said the other, "it is because since they got the franchise they have thought of nothing else. They talk of it by day, they dream of it by night. It is positively sickening." Yes, I daresay it is sickening to some of those old-fashioned Tories to see how those who were once their serfs are awakening to their new responsibilities and their new privileges. It will be still more sickening when the result of the election is known, for I do not hesitate to predict that if the towns do their duty there will be the greatest Liberal majority at the next election that the country has known during the last half-century.¹

CHAP.
XXVII.
ÆT. 49.

And predominantly it would be a Radical majority. Of democracy and to-morrow this was his confident vision. We must now see what happened to it and him. Another mind had another vision; and for a short time another will was to overpower his own.

¹ Birmingham, October 19, 1885.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SIGNS AND PORTENTS: AN ALL-CHANGING ELECTION

(AUTUMN 1885)

GENESIS of Gladstonian Home Rule—The Midlothian Manifesto and Radical Resistance—Chamberlain's Visit to Hawarden—A Last Chance lost—Clenched Antagonisms—Labouchere on "the mysteries of Hawarden"—The Candidate for West Birmingham—Lord Randolph *versus* Bright—A Stern Struggle—"We are Seven"—The Irish Vote turns the Boroughs—Liberalism in Danger—Chamberlain sweeps the Counties—Parnell holds the Balance.

I

BOOK
VI.
1885.

SINCE Morley's biography of Gladstone appeared nearly thirty years ago much has been added to our knowledge of the origins of the Home Rule crisis. In the following pages Chamberlain's papers in their turn throw new light upon inner motives and hidden workings.

Travellers may sometimes, as at Nîmes, see a great fountain issuing abruptly from the ground and pouring on as a torrent. Geographers can trace out the unseen sources and show how they are filled by percolation through the veins of the earth; how these take moisture from the surface, and the surface from the air; so that the very atmosphere imperceptibly changes into a rush of waters. In the same way may it happen that political forces are created in the air and underground before coming to a head and to open outburst. So was it in these next weeks.

Our generation will soon be as far from the first Home Rule convulsion as were the men of that day from the first Reform Bill. A calm, historical sense now can be applied as evenly to either of these events as to the other. One thing, to begin with, must be noted well. The separation between the young leader

and the old leader was already almost predetermined. At the end of July, Chamberlain had broken personally with Parnell, and a very few weeks later at Warrington he had not only repudiated Parnell's idea of an Irish Parliament but added: "If this claim were conceded we might as well for ever abandon all hope of maintaining a United Kingdom. . . . I hold that we are bound to take every step in our power to avert so great a calamity."¹ But at the same time, from early in July onwards, Gladstone's mind was drawing irresistibly towards Parnell's full Home Rule. When the Conservative Government dropped coercion and threw over Lord Spencer's system—and when its Viceroy was allowed to express his belief in some kind of Home Rule—the old leader perceived no alternative but Irish concessions going far beyond the young leader's idea of National Councils. As Gladstone saw it, the new Toryism had dealt a destructive blow at the former basis of the State. Solemnly though he defended his own and Lord Spencer's coercive regime, he never could revive it. Coercion, abandoned by the Conservatives, was henceforth impossible for Liberalism. There must be some new and bolder attempt to tranquillise, perhaps reconcile, Ireland, and at the same time to deliver the House of Commons from Irish domination in view of Parnell's approaching phalanx of over eighty men.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
ÆT. 49.

II

To crown his life by solving the Irish Question became an absorbing dream. Gladstone had not been consulted nor considered in connection with the "Radical Programme", whose authors thought that his leadership must soon expire. Now, in his turn, he did not take Chamberlain into his confidence. He acted in other ways.

What degree of self-government would be accepted as a settlement by Parnell? According to Mrs. O'Shea's account, Mr. Gladstone, through Lord Richard Grosvenor, the Liberal Chief Whip, interrogated her and repeatedly pressed for a distinct answer. When it came early in August, just before Gladstone left for his holiday in northern waters, nothing was clear but that the Irish dictator had raised his terms since his inter-

¹ Warrington, September 8. 1885.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

view with Lord Carnarvon, following a remarkable speech in favour of full Home Rule by Gladstone's own son.¹ That son leaves on record that "letters passed". He infers that Mrs. O'Shea took the initiative but does not contradict anything in her account of the correspondence.²

In the inner circles of Irish Nationalism the highest importance was attached to Herbert Gladstone's declaration in July:³

His experience of what twenty or thirty determined Irishmen could do in the House of Commons showed that eighty could make our present system of Government practically unworkable. . . . If then the Irish nation desired a Parliament upon a Federal basis, if the Irish leaders agreed that they could formulate and work a practical scheme—and he believed they could—if they loyally accepted the supremacy of the Crown and of the Imperial Parliament, then in God's name give them a Parliament on College Green.⁴

Soon it was rumoured amongst the Parnellites that Lord Spencer himself, the "Red Earl" and "arch-coercionist", as they liked to call him, was in the way of conversion. From early in August, Herbert Gladstone, who could not act for himself without suggesting large speculation, endeavoured through Labouchere to ascertain the mind of the Irish party. Of this the Radical leader knew nothing when at Warrington he repelled Parnell's anticipation of dictatorship at Westminster.

For over four months Mr. Gladstone's own procedure was enveloped in a profound and necessary ambiguity. The magnitude of the undertaking, its possible peril, the complexity of circumstances, several uncertainties only to be cleared up by the actual result of the coming polls—all these considerations determined that brooding mind, staking a great life on a last cast, to combine baffling caution in approach with a reserved courage that was measureless.

An indispensable instrument was his personal supremacy.

¹ *Charles Stewart Parnell*, by Katharine O'Shea, vol. ii. pp. 23-24.

² Lord Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, p. 304.

³ T. M. Healy, *Letters and Leaders of My Day*, vol. i. pp. 212-213.

⁴ Herbert Gladstone at Leeds, July 14, 1885.—A week before, on July 6, the new Conservative viceroy,

in the House of Lords, referred significantly to his experiences in the self-governing Colonies, and added: "I cannot conceive that there is any irreconcilable bar here in their native home to the unity and the amity of the two nations" (*The Fourth Earl of Carnarvon*, vol. iii. p. 167).

Once again it was restored and enhanced by irreconcilable quarrels between Radicals and Whigs. The feud between Chamberlain and Hartington raged openly and privately through all these months and had a curious influence on events.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

III

On August 1, Mr. Gladstone wrote: "My dear Chamberlain . . . should you wish to see me I am quite open to you but with limited powers of speech".¹ They met three days later in London. The conversation led to nothing of much mark, and chiefly left on the mind of the Radical visitor the pleasing impression that Gladstone was rather favourable to graduated taxation.

On the same day, Chamberlain conversed with Hartington and gave him a private view of the "unauthorised programme". The Whig chief notes in alarm: "I had some talk with Chamberlain yesterday. He seems inclined to drop the Irish proposals altogether for the present"; but what with land for the labourer, special taxation of wealth and free schools, "we are going as fast as we can in the Socialist direction".² A few days later (August 7) Hartington finds Mr. Gladstone, whom he never can understand in conversation, "unusually unintelligible", and his state of mind on the Irish Question "extremely alarming"; conceiving already that the policy of an Irish Council has collapsed; and that

a separate Legislature in some form or other will have to be considered. On other questions he seemed to be tolerably reasonable though vague. I should expect that if he spoke he would discourage a good many of Chamberlain's proposals.³

The ex-Premier then went to Norway to meditate more deeply both his strategy and his precautions. He was away for four weeks, and returned at the beginning of September to find the ranks of Liberalism thrown into disarray by dispute on the "unauthorised programme". That fact was by no means unfavourable to the chief condition of the "grand design" concerning Ireland—Gladstone's continued leadership. Chamber-

¹ Owing to his laryngitis. Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 216.

ii. pp. 71-72.

² *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 77-78 (Hartington to Granville, August 8, 1885).

³ Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

lain's campaign was in full swing; Hartington in full protest. Between them Liberalism was in distraction and tumult. Yet there was a strange feature. While Gladstone stood on the whole with the Whigs on the social ground—where the leader of the Liberal Left and the spokesman of the Liberal Right were at open war—Chamberlain and Hartington were in unwonted agreement on the Irish Question; the Radical even the more trenchant of the two in spurning the summons to surrender when Parnell's speech at Dublin demanded in a legislative sense "National Independence". That speech was called "as bad as bad could be" by Gladstone himself.¹ Who could decipher him?

Would the older leader still lead? Upon the answer everything depended. Had Gladstone then retired, the Liberal party, however strained within itself, could not have been shattered. Hartington saw clearly that if temporarily weakened by Whig secession it would be strongly reconstituted by the Radicals. Gladstone acquired the power to disrupt it because his renewed sway was thought by the Whig noblesse to be the only means for some further period of keeping Liberalism intact yet restricted to a moderate social policy. Had he not been for five years the Ulysses of accommodation? Had he not kept his Government together again and again when its dissensions seemed almost hopeless? But it was Gladstone after all who was to drive out the Whigs and the Radical leader too.

All the while the deeper motive working in Mr. Gladstone's heart and absorbing his thoughts was gaining a complete ascendancy over his imagination and will. In the Whig attitude on the social question he took no intense personal interest, though his detached sympathies were with them; the Radical programme of democratic organisation was repugnant. In these matters he had outlived his creative powers and was behind his age. But he glowed still with the Canningite ideal of his youth—emancipation. He wished and intended to resume the Liberal leadership, should electoral events enable, for the sake of grappling with the Irish Question, and for nothing else.

Before he returned from his cruise the two sections of his

¹ Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 220 (Gladstone to Hartington, September 3).

party were openly at sixes and sevens, to the delectation of Conservatives. In direct retort to the Radical leader's speech at Hull upon the rights of man as henceforth to be interpreted, the Whig leader stoutly defended the "rights of property".¹ Through the *Birmingham Daily Post* Chamberlain replied bluntly:

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

Is it to be understood that the measures of social reform advocated by what we may call the Radical members of the late Government are to be excluded from the programme with which the Liberal party is going before the electors?

Perhaps Hartington—went on the article—did not mean all he seemed to say, but if he did, he would disrupt the party. Detached observers of politics judged that the Whigs would soon be forced into fusion with the Conservatives. Chamberlain went to Warrington and described Hartington as Rip van Winkle.

The inwardness of this charged and complicated situation is vividly depicted in letters to Chamberlain by John Morley, who frequents aristocratic society much in the manner of which his friend was accused later. Visiting Lord Rosebery, he finds the excellent Hartington under the same roof and comments from Mentmore:

FROM MORLEY

September 3, 1885.—I found a houseful here including besides Hartington and Harcourt your famous friend Lady Dorothy,² sparkling with the badge of the Primrose League. I have had a good deal of talk both with Hartington and my host. I have spoken very plainly to the latter. . . . H. [Hartington] said to him this morning that he feared he had been even clumsier than usual. And this seems to be about the truth of it. . . . I said that he ought to be careful—that you had spoken civilly of the Whigs, and in favour of unity, at Hull—and that Hartington ought to have shown the same spirit. Rosebery again agreed. I have just seen Hartington off at the station. His last word to me, *à propos de rien*, was: "Well, I hope Chamberlain won't declare war next week. . . ." I had a long talk with Hartington about Free Schools. He says Gladstone told him after your Hull speech that he (Mr. G.) was dead against F.S. . . . *About Mr. G., Hartington thinks he won't come back, but Rosebery feels sure he will.*

¹ Hartington at Waterfoot, August 29, 1885.

² Lady Dorothy Nevill.

BOOK
VI.
—
1885.

Next day, Morley reports that in the opinion of some gossips Chamberlain may soon become "leader of the whole party":

September 4.—I had a long talk with Lefevre to-day. . . . He is all right; he only hopes that "Chamberlain won't forget that he may now almost any day possibly find himself leader of the whole party, Whigs and all". No harm in that. Goschen was at the Club too—and I had a good talk with him likewise. . . . *I suspect from one or two casual phrases that Goschen is working Hartington sourdement.* I don't believe he will make much out of Hartington, who to my mind does *not* mean war.

IV

Gladstone stopped one kind of cobweb-spinning. He laid down a condition. He required and received from the leaders of both the bickering wings—but not too willingly nor hopefully from either—the formal profession of their wish that he should continue in command. Then he addressed himself to composition, elaborated his pacifying encyclical to the whole party, and entered into delicate communications with Birmingham. On September 9 he defines his problem—

not to go into conflict with either the right wing of the party for whom Hartington has spoken or the left wing for whom Chamberlain, I suppose, spoke last night [at Warrington]. I do not say they are to be treated as on a footing, but I must do no act disparaging to Chamberlain's wing.¹

The nuance of disparagement is slight but perceptible. On the same day, however, he writes to Chamberlain direct.² An important correspondence ensues:

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

Hawarden, September 9.—I suppose we have all of us our difficulties, and I am fighting with my own. The question for me is between cutting out, which I personally much desire, and which I am free to do, or on the other hand going through the election with a view to render to the party such service as I can in helping to maintain its unity, which I desire to see maintained for two very special reasons. 1. Only the Liberal

¹ Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 222 (to Granville). papers reported Chamberlain's speech at Warrington rejecting Parnell's domination.

² It was the day when the news-

party can (if it can) cope with the great Irish question which may arise three months hence. 2. Because of the demoralised and dangerous condition of the Tory party, with R. Churchill in its bosom and to a great extent in its leadership.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

I have prepared with much labour and anxiety such an address as I might issue if I ask for re-election. In this it is my duty, and my desire, to avoid collision with either wing of the party. But I can and shall only do this if I believe it to be really desired by the representative men. Hartington has urged me to do it. I wish to know your view upon the point if you will kindly give it me. . . . I write after having read your telling speech at Warrington and where I differ should proceed as above described. I think it will be well for me frankly to introduce your name and to explain our relations.

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

September 10.— . . . I rejoice that your health is so far re-established that you are able to contemplate the continued leadership of the Liberal party. . . . I think I ought not to conceal from you my serious fear that common action between the different sections of the party will be impossible unless Lord Hartington and his friends advance considerably from the position taken up by him in his recent speech at Waterfoot. I am convinced that any attempt to restrict the programme of the party to the questions mentioned by him would be fatal to success.¹ . . . I do not quite comprehend the concluding paragraph of your letter. . . . If this means that you would feel it necessary to point out the exact character of any difference which may exist, I should greatly fear that such a course would necessitate something in the nature of a reply and would apparently bring the leaders of the Radical section in conflict with yourself, a position which I should most seriously deprecate. . . .

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

September 11.— . . . Granville says, and I entirely agree with him, that what we have now to deal with is the Dissolution. The experiences of the election will enlarge our knowledge. It will tell us absolutely whether the Tories are to go to the wall, and it will show us, from Ireland and elsewhere, more clearly than we see now, the proper conditions of a

¹ An omitted passage of this long letter goes on to say that Chamberlain has consulted Dilke, who agrees upon the necessity of legislation for the agricultural labourer. This and free education also a future Liberal administration must concede. Otherwise, "it would be impossible for us to join".

BOOK
VI.
1885.

Liberal Government. With much consideration and labour I have, in substance, framed a long paper. . . . On the basis thus declared I want to know . . . whether it is wished that I should go forward or retire. This question I can only put to few in correspondence; I put it specifically to you, Hartington and Granville. I have Granville's "Yes", founded, I think, on confidence. . . . I regret to have alarmed you most needlessly about the naming. It has no relation to any subject of differences; but it is in connection with defensive remarks on the general structure and working of the party, which I endeavour to justify. . . . It will perhaps remain for me to consider whether I can put forth my address, not abating any of its cautions but stating expressly that I speak for myself alone—or whether for me the end has come. . . . (*P.S.*) I sorrowfully agree in your view [at Warrington] of the present aspect of the Irish question;¹ but on the whole I shed tears over the grave of the Central Board and am extremely unsanguine as to a legislative settlement.

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

September 12.—I am very much obliged to you for your further letter, which I have shown to Dilke. . . . We earnestly desire that you may see your way to continue at the head of the Liberal party and to lead us to victory in the ensuing elections. . . . We are most anxious to agree with you on every point of your proposed address. At the same time we feel that the exclusion of any subjects which we consider essential unless accompanied by the clearest qualifications will be accepted by public opinion as committing you to an opposite opinion. . . .

My most serious apprehension is, however, with regard to the third point in your programme, that, namely, in which you propose to deal with the land question. It is unfortunately impossible in this connection to put entirely out of view Hartington's recent speech at Waterfoot, which was elaborately contrived to emphasise the difference of opinion that unfortunately prevails. If, after this speech, you were to repeat categorically the points of Hartington's programme, without any favourable reference to the additions which we are anxious to make to it, your declaration would be universally received as a slap in the face to us and as a final acceptance of Hartington's position.

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

September 14.—I do not think any matter of difficulty remains. . . . On Land, according to your request, I send you what I propose. I have

¹ This remark is much to be noted.

striven very hard to be perfectly fair as between you and Hartington. . . . In writing all the parts of the address which directly touched your questions, I have borne carefully in mind the language of your recent speech as to the footing which you claimed for them.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

These were not auspicious signs. Worse were to come. A few days later appeared the most voluminous and dimly oracular of all recorded manifestos (September 18). The Irish part was equally compatible with emphatic Unionism or Nationalist Home Rule. For the rest, Gladstone's encyclical was not only pacific but soporific. On reform of taxation he leaned rather towards the Radicals. Otherwise their claims were negatived or evaded. Mr. Gladstone identified himself with Lord Hartington on a basic part of the "unauthorised programme", land reform—which Chamberlain at the moment was advocating at Glasgow and Inverness with inmost conviction amidst immense enthusiasm. This was just what he had acutely apprehended. The veteran spoke him fair but boded no good. On its Radical side "the big umbrella" was the reverse of waterproof. Goschen cries that the manifesto is all for the Whigs. Hartington thinks it "rather a weak production" but "leans to the side of moderation".¹ Parnell astutely hails it for tactical reasons; and also his judgment pierces to the truth. He knows as Chamberlain does not what enquiries are already on foot for the information of Hawarden; he feels that Gladstone is on the way of conversion to Home Rule.

What the Radicals thought at the moment it is essential to understand:

September 19, 1885.—Morley to Chamberlain.— . . . Gladstone's manifesto is not very exhilarating but we must make the best on't, I suppose. His list of business will fill three or four sessions very profitably. But the tone of the thing is very poor. Its composition is extremely odious in my eyes—so vague, wordy, indefinite. I had a good meeting at Hackney but you were probably too busy to look at any speeches but your own. I gave one or two flicks to Hartington and spoke a good word for my poor, meek, defenceless friend, Mr. Chamberlain.

September 20, 1885.—Chamberlain to Dilke.— . . . The Manifesto is, as

¹ Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. p. 73 (Hartington to Goschen, September 20, 1885).

BOOK
VI.
1885.

I expected, bad—it is a slap in the face to us—especially the part about Free Education. I was so busy and worried that I did not write to Mr. G. I am now going to do so and to tell him frankly that I am dissatisfied and to reiterate my statement that I will not join any Government with a programme confined to his four points. . . . His reign cannot be a long one. . . . People here [Birmingham] are very angry at inadequate character of manifesto. Scotch Radicals ditto. If we chose to go into direct opposition we might smash him, but the game is not worth the candle, I think. I miss you here—I wish you were still with me.

September 20, 1885.—Chamberlain to Harcourt.—Now, as to the Manifesto, I do not like it of course and the Chief has shewn a little sharp practice in the matter. He wrote to me for my opinion and Dilke's on his account of the forthcoming performance. A correspondence ensued. I made objections and at last asked to see the original—so far as land was concerned. He sent this and then published without waiting reply. I especially object to the passages about Free Education. . . .

September 21.—Chamberlain to Morley.— . . . I intend to insist on the power to acquire land compulsorily and on Free Schools. If Mr. G. will not accept, I will come and sit below the gangway.

We now see very well why Chamberlain resolved that he would not sacrifice his Radicalism for office. Three months before the Home Rule crisis—but only after some proper doubt—he made up his mind and declared it publicly both in his “ultimatum speech” at the “Old Vic” and at Bradford. He would not serve again under Gladstone except on terms. Chamberlain was absorbed by one thing, the British social question; Gladstone by another, the Irish national question. In imagination of the next phase in public life they were differently possessed. When this is so, conversation may take place, but minds do not meet. Any extent of inward estrangement is possible before open division occurs.

V

What the Radical leader several times had hinted broadly since the last Liberal Government fell, he now puts down in black and white on returning from his Scottish expedition. He sends his ultimatum to Hawarden before making it public

in his speeches. He cannot join any administration on the basis of the manifesto to Midlothian.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
ÆT. 49.

CHAMBERLAIN AND GLADSTONE

September 20.—Chamberlain.—As the manifesto has in the meantime been published it is unnecessary that I should offer any observation on particular passages. I fear that it has been generally accepted as a blow to the Radical Party and a complete acceptance of the insufficient programme put forward by Lord Hartington at Waterfoot. . . . I should consider myself personally dishonoured if I joined any administration formed on the narrow basis of the programme now presented, which appears to exclude from practical and immediate consideration every proposal which I have recently advocated. . . .

September 22.—Gladstone.— . . . You and Hartington were both demurring in opposite senses, and I made to each the same reply. My aim was for the election only, in giving form to my Address. . . . Bright once said with much force and sense that the average opinion of the party ought to be the rule of immediate action. It is likely that there may be a split in the far or middle distance, but I shall have nothing to do with it, and you I am sure do not wish to anticipate it or force it on. . . . Later on, I should like much to explain to you my personal views and intentions in conversation. It would be difficult to do so in writing.

September 23.—Chamberlain.— . . . I do not entertain the personal ambitions which some persons attribute to me. . . . When the time comes for a decision I shall be quite as ready to fall back into the ranks as to continue in any prominent position. I shall feel honoured at any time to hear the expression of your views on the Irish and other public questions.

September 26.—Gladstone.—I felt well pleased and easy after receiving your note . . . but there is a point I should like to put to you with reference to your self-denying ordinance making the three points conditions of office. Supposing Parnell to come back 80 to 90 strong, to keep them together, to bring forward a plan which shall contain in your opinion adequate securities for the Union of the Empire, and to press this plan under whatever name as having claims to precedence (claims which could hardly be denied even by opponents)—do you think no Government should be formed to promote such a plan unless the three

BOOK

VI.

1885.

points¹ were glued on to it at the same time? Do you not think you would do well to reserve elbow-room for a case like this? I hope you will not think my suggestion—it is not a question—captious and a man-trap; it is meant in a very different sense. A Liberal majority is assumed in it.

September 28.—Chamberlain.—I had certainly not contemplated the contingency you suggest. . . . I can hardly think it probable that Parnell will bring forward any scheme that a Liberal Government could support. He has so entirely put Local Government in the background, and has so plainly declared for a separate and independent Parliament that I have little hope of his action. If, however, he did take the course suggested by your letter, I should be bound to strain every nerve to assist the Government in dealing with it. I am not, however, certain that I could not render more help from outside than as a member of the Cabinet. . . .

These decisive letters show a dilemma more creditable to human nature than has been thought. These two men, contrasts from the first in origin, training, temperament, are now opposites in ideas, visions and desires. Mentally they are living in two different worlds. Their meanings are essentially adverse and their wills unyielding. Each is far from realising what reserves of faculty and determination are latent in the other. They cannot long go together.

Chamberlain may be attacked on any ground more easily than for inconsistency in the first Home Rule crisis. Gladstone would accept the appearance of a Parnellite phalanx over 80 strong as practically a ruling fact. Chamberlain would not. Rather, in what he conceives to be the interests of British and Irish democracy alike, he would adopt any means, up to keeping the Conservatives in office, to force Parnell to moderate his terms, and to prevent him from dictating a policy by manipulating the balance of power. Not guessing yet the intricate secrets of Eltham, he thought Parnell had shown rank bad faith over the National Council policy and had struck him a foul blow.

The older man's vision of the portentous situation actually approaching is far the surer. One good reason is that he may well foresee what he intends to create. He is engrossed by the Irish

¹ Free education, reformed taxation and compulsory powers of local authorities to acquire land at fair values.

Question. The young man is engrossed by what he thinks a far bigger thing—a more long-standing scandal of neglect—and he has no intention of allowing the British social question to be swept aside by the Irish claim to the extreme of a separate Parliament. Home Rule to that degree he has repudiated always. State rights more or less on the American model under a common Parliament has been his idea, and he has said again and again that he will not go beyond it. On this issue, what he says now and hereafter he means to the uttermost.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

Following his blunt letter to Gladstone after the Midlothian manifesto he repeats publicly (September 24) at the "Old Vic", as already narrated, his ultimatum—that he will stand out rather than take office in any Cabinet excluding the irreducible minimum of Radical demands; and Morley, we may recollect, heartily approves. "Don't let us have the last five years over again." Dilke advised more amenity in manner, but encouraged the spirit. The "true Whigs", he said to his friend, were "an imperceptible minority", and never again ought there to be a Cabinet nominally Liberal but half composed of peers and neutralised by Whig negation.¹ Chamberlain puts it, they must not be "lay figures in a Cabinet of Goschens".² His position is perfectly intelligible.

He saw the situation as unfair to Liberalism and deadly to it. The Conservatives always had the House of Lords. Their principles were entrenched as well on the Liberal side. Apart from Ireland and mild reform of taxation, Gladstone was the arch-Conservative. Hartington and Goschen were more Conservative than many of the name. Instead of taking their place on the other side, they lingered with Liberalism to emasculate it; and this at the moment when its future under the enlarged franchise depended on whether it would throw in its lot with advancing democracy or no. Advance was long overdue; our social contrasts shameful; the Birmingham model of organised improvement a reproach to national inertia.

Another influence counted. Chamberlain, not willing to be second in intrepidity to any man, was at this time lost in admiration of the success on the other side of his own methods and

¹ Dilke to Chamberlain, September 25, 1885.

- Chamberlain to Dilke, September 28, 1885.

BOOK
VI.

1885.

sentiments as adapted by Lord Randolph Churchill. The Radical leader was resolved to be no less effective in dealing with the "old gang" on his own side. He would not be "muzzled" again by office, nor endure a repetition of the miserable controversies with his colleagues and with the Crown on free speech. He must be entitled henceforth to action without the former restraints.

By comparison with that need, office was nothing at all. He could wait. Almost certainly he would not have long to wait. So far office had on the whole impeded him. Looking back, he saw that he might have been the master of the Cabinet of 1880 had he refused to join it. By standing out of any further Liberal Government formed on conventional lines, he could compel it to move and soon supersede it.

VI

By far the best views of the last struggle of Whigs and Radicals within the old Liberal party, in these months before its disruption, appear in an animated correspondence at this time. Harcourt, as conciliator, tried to play the part properly belonging to a leader. Admiring the progress of the "unauthorised" campaigner, of whose powers he took a just measure, he made devoted efforts for peace and goodwill between the jarring sections.

CHAMBERLAIN AND HARCOURT

September 1, 1885.—Harcourt.— . . . I foresee there will be much difficulty in keeping the two wings of the army in a proper spirit of co-operation, and I will do all I can to promote it. . . .¹ Loulou has telegraphed his arrival per *Sunbeam* at Wick last night. I go to London this evening to meet him. I suppose he will report the state of the "Grand Old Man's" mind and body on which so much depends. Till we know that we can make very little forecast, and I have been waiting patiently for this information. I will write to you from Mentmore, where I go to-morrow till Saturday, when I shall perhaps be able to tell you something worth knowing which I can't do at present. . . .

September 3.—Chamberlain.— . . . I begged Hartington before I left

¹ Written immediately after Hartington's repudiation of Chamberlain at Waterfoot.

town not to "throw down the gauntlet". Why will he do it—and just when two-thirds of all the county candidates have pledged themselves more or less to the proposals that he condemns? I will try and be as moderate as possible—but I think it quite possible that Hartington's speech has destroyed the expected Liberal majority.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

September 6.—Harcourt.— . . . You have no idea how moderate you can be *till you try*. . . . I hope you will reflect that anything which looks like an open breach between Hartington and yourself may very seriously influence Mr. G.'s future action, and I am sure with a view to the general interests you cannot wish to drive him out of the field. I suppose that Rosebery reported to you Hartington's phrase that "he had expressed himself on the land question *more clumsily even than usual*". It is impossible to be angry with such frankness.

September 14.—Harcourt.—I have been meaning every day to tell you how satisfactory I thought your speech. You tried to be moderate, and as I predicted you perfectly succeeded. No Rip van Winkle (even so confirmed a one as your humble servant) could profess to be alarmed. . . . Have you heard from, or of, Gladstone and what he is doing? I have heard nothing since the return from Elba.

September 20.—Chamberlain.— . . . We must secure a great Liberal majority, but then the real difficulty will arise. I have told Mr. G. that I will not join any Government which does not give Dilke and self a free hand as to Local Government including the powers to acquire land compulsorily and which does not also leave us free to speak and vote on Free Education. . . . If Mr. G. cannot accept conditions the Radicals will remain outside the Government. I should be dishonoured in my own eyes if I accepted office again without a clear understanding on these points. . . . I shall be quite ready for a holyday when the new Government is formed.

September 24.—Harcourt.— . . . As to the conduct of the G.O.M. in the matter of the Manifesto you must have a good deal of consideration for the difficulties of his position. . . . He told Hartington that he "did not think it right to make others responsible for the terms of his address" and that he had "taken care to avoid treading on the toes of either the right or left wing". . . . He says if he is not wanted he will "cut out" and he doubts I think if either you or Hartington want him. But I hope in this he is mistaken for *he is wanted* and neither section can do without him. . . . As to what you say about remaining outside a new Liberal

BOOK
VI.

1885.

Government, forgive me for saying that it is all nonsense. If a Liberal Government cannot be formed *with* you and Dilke it certainly cannot be formed *without* you. You have acquired the right and the power to make your own conditions and I am sure those you make will be reasonable ones. . . .

September 25.—Chamberlain.— . . . I have as you know the most sincere respect for Hartington—I would say more if I thought the feeling was reciprocal—but the time has come when he must choose. If he likes to put his money on Goschen I will not complain, but I think he will lose the race. If he will work with me I do not think he will find me exacting. In the first place I care absolutely nothing about personal considerations, and, providing that we can agree about policy, there will never arise any other question of difference. And as to policy I am, and always have been, distinctly opportunist.¹ I have sought for a minimum to satisfy the just expectations of the Radical section. . . .

September 30.—Harcourt.— . . . I quite agree with you as to the great preponderance of Radical sentiment in the constituencies. I am not any more than you an ardent admirer of the “Manifesto”. . . . My action will be, as it has always, to keep the crew together. As you will have seen, I am with you about *Free Education* and substantially on the *Land*. As to *taxation* I am not sure that I understand your view fully. My own disposition is rather towards a *property tax* than increased burthens on *Income*. I don’t think *realised* wealth bears enough. . . .

September 30.—Chamberlain.—Your last speech was splendid. . . . Just now I am alone, and sometimes inclined to be depressed over the whole business, but yours is a trumpet note and gives me encouragement and hope.² I wonder sometimes what Mr. G. thinks of the part his late colleagues are playing in the electoral campaign. Of the peers I hear complaints that Carlingford is holding aloof from Radical candidates, and with the exception of Rosebery not one of them has made a single speech—and if they did nobody would know and nobody would care. Of the Commoners you and I are the only two who have hitherto had the slightest influence on public opinion. Is the next Cabinet to consist in equal proportion of men for whose opinion no living soul cares a single straw? . . .

¹ Evidently from what goes before—his uncompromising ultimatum on his minimum—he means “practical,” not intransigent.

² He felt very severely at this time the loss of Dilke’s power to play a telling part in the struggle.

October 7.—*Harcourt*.—I saw Hartington again yesterday and am sorry to say my impression of his state of mind was not as favourable as that which I wrote to you from Mentmore. I think “Rip van Winkle” stuck a good deal in his gizzard, and he is exercised on the question of whether your declaration that you would not join if your programme *was excluded* meant that you insisted it should be *included*. I told him I understood you at Bradford to have explained as you wrote to me that all you required was that you should have a “free voice and vote” and that these things should be regarded as open questions as the ballot used to be down to 1868. If you agree to this, it would be a good thing if you made it clearer than you have done. We must see what Hartington says when he speaks on Saturday next in Lincolnshire. His bark is usually worse than his bite, and when it comes to the point he usually does what is satisfactory. . . . I spoke very strongly on the mischief of accentuating differences just now. . . .

CHAP.
XXVIII.
ÆT. 49.

October 9.—*Chamberlain*.— . . . If Hartington wants war he can have it. “Rip van Winkle” was a very mild retort on his Waterfoot speech in which he went out of his way to throw dirt on every single thing I had been saying. . . . If he likes to try his hand at doing without the Radicals and relying on Goschen, now is his opportunity. Dilke and Morley and I will in that case formulate a still more definite and advanced policy and we will try to run a Radical in every constituency. We have no alternative. If we were now to give up the very moderate minimum to which we are committed, the very stones would cry out and we would simply be elbowed out of the way to make room for more advanced and less reasonable politicians. Hartington is up in a balloon and he perversely ignores the changes in public opinion and the determination of the great majority of the party he proposes to lead. . . .

These combative tones are explained partly by the Radical leader’s resolution on other accounts not to endure “the last five years over again”, partly by his high confidence in the electoral prospects. What of them? Schnadhorst, after diligent enquiry about every one of the constituencies, confirmed Chamberlain in the happy belief that the Liberals would have a majority of at least sixty over the Tories and Parnellites combined. The Whigs in the next House of Commons would no longer have strength to support past pretensions. The leader of Radical reform, and not Parnell, would hold the balance of

BOOK
VI.
1885.

power in the new Parliament. It proved so indeed, though not in the manner prophesied. Had Liberalism secured at the coming elections a majority independent of Parnell all following history would have been different and perhaps better.

Gladstone's manifesto veiling these dissensions had not composed them. As Chamberlain became more trenchant Hartington became more stolid:

I think I shall take an early opportunity of making as definite a declaration of my position as Chamberlain has done of his. I am to see Harcourt to-morrow, but he appears to have definitely decided to go with Chamberlain. . . . Of course in the long run the active men will have their own way, and the future Liberal party will be Radical. I see nothing for the Whigs but to disappear or turn Tories. I think I shall prefer the former.

He reproaches the peers with lethargy in the anti-Birmingham cause.¹ Granville answers:

When you and Harcourt complain . . . I imagine you start from opposite sides. He would like us strongly to support Chamberlain, you would like us to make Conservative speeches against him. . . . I should be sorry if you were to expose yourself to the reproach of being like Chamberlain, a dissolvent—particularly if the result is to place him on a pedestal.²

Some may suggest that by comparison with the scope of modern reforms the disputes about free schools, freer access to the land and the rest were small. There was more in it. It was to the developments between that day and ours that Radicals and Whigs were looking. Chamberlain's proposals, his "minimum" at the moment, were only a preliminary. There might yet have been temporary accommodations sufficient for a short and uneasy period to patch up a precarious compromise between the patricians and the tribune. But in the new era the proper place of the Whig leader, as he felt in his heart, was with the Conservatives. Chamberlain and Hartington were honestly divided by antagonism of purpose, and they could not have worked together in another Liberal Government.

¹ Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. p. 74 (Hartington to Granville, October 3, 1885). ² *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 75-76 (Granville to Hartington).

VII

So matters stood when Chamberlain was astonished by a sudden summons to Hawarden, where desire for his company never had occurred. How did that visit originate? The amusing truth shows why this last chance of inward reconciliation between the two men was little likely to be fruitful. The circumstances have been recorded by that lively raconteur, George Russell.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
ÆT. 49.

Mr. Russell was then regarded as a light of young Liberalism; his after-dinner speeches were amongst the best of the day; he was the more popular on his own side because his advanced opinions flouted the feelings of his kinsman, the Duke of Bedford. Since his first session of 1880 this young member for Aylesbury had been strongly attracted by Chamberlain:

He was wholly free from the stiffness and pomposity which the old hacks of the Liberal Cabinet sedulously cultivated. He received one at once on the footing of comradeship and equality; and he talked with that complete openness which, when displayed by an older to a younger man, is in itself a compliment . . . and his hospitality was unbounded. He was a perfect host, receiving his guests with "that honest joy which warms more than dinner or wine"; mixing his parties adroitly, and inciting though never dominating the conversation.¹

So relations had gone on between the Radical leader and the member for Aylesbury for some years. The latter held a minor office in the second Gladstone administration; and after its fall was a warm supporter of the "unauthorised programme" as against what he called "the fatal *laissez-faire* which the Whigs regarded as the only safe statesmanship"—the "hoary shibboleths of the Manchester school".

Welcome everywhere, Russell went to Hawarden on October 2 for a few days' visit. The sequel must be told in his own words. He had found at the meetings he had been addressing that when "one mentioned the name of Gladstone there was a decorous 'Hear, hear'; but when one came to Chamberlain the

¹ G. W. E. Russell, "Joseph Chamberlain: A Phase", in the *Cornhill Magazine*, September 1914.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

cheering lifted the roof and lasted for five minutes”¹ When, however, he arrived at Hawarden and during some part of the time was alone with his host, he discovered that the Liberal leader, himself a giant no doubt, was looking at the Radical leader through the wrong end of the telescope and saw him small. A bare fortnight before, Chamberlain’s progress in Scotland had been triumphal in the full sense. Harcourt could write of it, “You have conquered a position of vantage from which you can never be displaced”. Of all this the mighty old man, full of his own intents, was sublimely unconscious.

Of Mr. Chamberlain’s popularity, capacity and ascendancy over the Radical part of the party he seemed to have no conception. I confessed myself an adherent of the “unauthorised programme” and Mr. Gladstone evidently believed me to be—what I was not—in Mr. Chamberlain’s confidence. “What does Chamberlain mean?” he asked. I replied that so far as I knew, Chamberlain did not mean to dethrone my host from the Liberal leadership, and probably felt that he could not do so if he wished; but that I thought he most certainly meant to prevent Lord Hartington from succeeding to the leadership when Mr. Gladstone should surrender it. “But”, I added, “surely the best way would be for you to ask Chamberlain to come here and talk it out with him.”²

At this suggestion Mr. Gladstone at first opened his eyes with incredulity:

My host could not have looked more amazed if I had suggested inviting the Pope or the Sultan; but my persuasions prevailed over his reluctance to mix political with private life, and the invitation was duly despatched and accepted.

Elsewhere Russell adds, “I wrote the telegraphic invitation with my own hand, and backed it with a letter to Mr. Chamberlain”.³

This is convincing as vivacious. As we know, Gladstone had already expressed some notion of personal conversation with the Radical leader “later on”, but until now had felt no prompting. Nor can we fail to appreciate his lack of eagerness. The circum-

¹ G. W. E. Russell, “Joseph Chamberlain: A Phase”, in the *Cornhill Magazine*, September 1914.

² G. W. E. Russell, *Independent*

Review, November 1903.

³ *Cornhill Magazine*, September 1914.

stances had never seemed less promising. Chamberlain in his latest letter to Hawarden had flatly repeated his disinclination to concede Parnell's probable demands. Since then he had twice declared publicly that he would not serve again under Mr. Gladstone except on terms leaving him free to drive the Radical movement.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
ÆT. 49.

Chamberlain at Hawarden did not feel that the visit was critical, even fateful—the last real chance in that generation for many things. Several pages of Morley's third volume are devoted to Gladstone's account. Luckily, the visitor recorded his own ideas.

He arrived on October 7 and stayed the night. In the afternoon of the first day they went for a walk in the woods, and the oldest trees there never had looked down upon an equal contrast of political types—the old man nearing eighty, prophetic, absorbed by one idea, blazing within but preternaturally circumspect; his companion, lithe, direct, looking a youth by comparison; the one face as leonine as aged, the other hardy and cool. In this walk they discussed chiefly the Irish Question. Next day they sat for hours in the great library. On this occasion they talked solely of questions other than Irish. It does not seem that Chamberlain was allowed to smoke.¹ It might have helped confidences. But in this as in all else but courage they were opposites. Gladstone would have abhorred Tobacco-Parliaments fuming as at Highbury. The visitor's fresh impressions are these:

TO DILKE

Hawarden Castle, October 7, 1885.—I was sent for here but up to now I do not know why² . . . Mr. G. thinks Mr. Parnell's last speech more satisfactory. I confess I had not perceived the improvement. He is still very sweet on National Councils. He is much afraid of a further rising in the East—which may set the new States at loggerheads³ and bring Austria and Russia into the field. He showed me a letter from Mundella, in which *inter alia* that really great and good man declared for Free Education. I am very curious to know what Salisbury will say at Newport. Will he produce a programme?

¹ He went to Herbert Gladstone's room to smoke. (*After Thirty Years*, p. 310).

with a speech which Dilke has just made.

² An omitted passage deals only with a speech which Dilke has just made.

³ The war between Serbia and Bulgaria broke out on November 14.

BOOK

VI.

1885.

Highbury, October 9, 1885.—I am not quite certain what was Mr. G.'s object in sending for me. I suppose he desired to minimise our conditions as far as possible. He was very pleasant and very well with no apparent trace of his hoarseness.

He spoke at considerable length on the Irish question—said he was more than ever impressed with the advantages of the Central Council Scheme and had written strongly to that effect to Hartington.

But I do not gather that he has any definite plan under present circumstances.¹ He thought Parnell's last speech more moderate (I confess I do not agree with him), and I suppose if we get a majority his first effort will be to find a *modus vivendi* and to enter into direct communications with this object.

As regards Radical programme, I stuck to the terms of your speech, viz.:—*1st.* Compulsory powers for acquiring land to be ensured in Local Government Bill. *2nd.* Freedom to speak and vote as we liked on question of Free Schools. He boggled a good deal over this, and said it was very weakening to a Government, but I told him we could not honestly do less and that I expected a large majority of Liberals in favour of the proposal.

We did not come to any positive conclusion—nor do I think he has absolutely made up his mind, but the tone of the conversation inferred that he was seeking to work with us and had no idea of doing without us.

At the close he spoke of his intention to give up the leadership soon after the new Parliament meets. I protested and said that if he did this, our whole attitude would be changed and we must and should ask from Hartington much larger concessions than we were prepared to accept from him.

I expect the force of circumstances will keep him in his place till the end though I believe he is sincerely anxious to be free.

I put to him the argument of your last letter—as to the composition of the last Cabinet and the impossibility of trusting Radical policy to the judgment of such men. He seemed impressed but did not say anything—nor give any hint of the composition of the next. The only suggestive remark was his warm praise of Lord Granville, which I thought suspicious and indicating an intention to have him again in the Government.

¹ "He is very full of the Irish question but I do not think he has any definite plan of dealing with it" (Chamberlain to Harcourt, October 9, after returning from Hawarden).

These few notes of the conversations were amplified by Chamberlain in reminiscences set down some years later:¹

CHAP.
XXVIII.
ÆT. 49.

At that time I assumed that we should come back with a majority over the Irish and the Conservatives combined, and I urged upon Mr. Gladstone that in that case our policy would be to offer a land bill and a local government bill without saying anything about Home Rule. I thought that the Irish must support us in these two measures and that in this way we could carry on the Government for two or more years. That was enough to look forward to, and possibly we might find other reforms on which we could work together. Parnell might be again willing to take up the National Councils scheme. If not, and he insisted on extreme views, we could always fight him and dissolve on the question, when I believed we should obtain an increased majority.

Mr. Gladstone did not offer much criticism on this proposal, but he referred several times to the difficulties of carrying on the Government in face of the opposition of 86 Irishmen of the stamp of the Nationalist members, and expressed his doubt whether Parnell would ever go back to the National Councils scheme. . . . He also suggested that perhaps the Conservative Government would be prepared to go in the direction of Home Rule.

He did not say a word about the negotiations² then going on between him and Members of the Irish Party.³

On the second day:

Almost at the close of the interview Mr. Gladstone said, "I think I ought to tell you that it is not my intention to remain much longer in public life. I have, as you know, long wished to retire. I have been induced by the representations of yourself and my other colleagues to remain at the head of the party much longer than I wished or intended. I have carried you through the Franchise Bill and I am now going to stand at your head for the General Election, but as soon as you are fairly started in the new Parliament, and in a very few months, I propose to hand over the leadership to Hartington. . . ." I did not think at the time that he was likely to maintain his expressed intention to resign, but it seemed to me indirectly a proof that he did not seriously contemplate

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

² Carried on indirectly through Herbert Gladstone and Labouchere, these pourparlers, not yet negotia-

tions, were soon brought to Chamberlain's notice by Labouchere himself, and this made sharp mischief.

³ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
VI.
1885.

a Home Rule programme, with which, of course, any suggestion of resignation would have been entirely inconsistent.¹

VIII

Gladstone's account to Lord Granville does not seriously conflict on any point with Chamberlain's version. The host says indeed of the guest that on the Irish Question

he and I are pretty well agreed; unless upon a secondary point, namely, whether Parnell would be satisfied to acquiesce in a County Government bill, good so far as it went, maintaining on other matters his present general attitude. We agreed, I think, that a prolongation of the present relations of the Irish party would be a national disgrace and the civilised world would scoff at the political genius of countries which could not contrive so far to understand one another as to bring their differences to an accommodation.²

What the unwonted visitor from Birmingham gathered on the contrary was that Gladstone still prized the merits of the National Council scheme, but apart from that had no plan in proportion to his large anxieties. The host's language, though impressive, was enveloped; the Radical leader neither perceived its real drift nor was awakened to any sense of the scale on which Gladstone's imagination was working. We may be sure enough that the guest's part in the dialogue was economical. Had there been any real agreement between them about the future the host would not have concluded his version of the conversations with these words: "He [Chamberlain] said it might be right for him to look as a friend on the formation of a Liberal Government having (as I understood) moderate but intelligible plans, without forming part of it".³

It is necessary now to establish the historic truth of the case. This can be done with precision and finality. It is as certain as unfortunate that Chamberlain left Hawarden without having been taken into confidence with regard to the state of Gladstone's mind on the Irish Question.

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

² *Ibid.* p. 226.

³ Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 225.

Gladstone, with his social predilection for the Whig noblesse, unbosomed himself more amply and intimately to Lord Derby of all men, who also was a visitor to Hawarden just a few days before and gave a convincing account exactly borne out by the approaching facts:

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

He [Gladstone] said he had been studying the subject a good deal; that he had come to the conclusion that the Union was a mistake; that Pitt had assigned no sufficient justification for *destroying the national life of Ireland*; that he did not hold the popular theory that a single executive could not co-exist with two independent legislatures (witness Norway and Sweden, Austria and Hungary); he did not believe the Irish irreconcilable; thought they would have accepted moderate terms till R. Churchill came into power; now nothing less than a Parliament of their own would satisfy them; the question was becoming urgent; the Irish were better organised than ever; we could not go on with eighty or ninety of them in the House of Commons—the state of that body now was a disgrace, and it would be worse in the new Parliament.¹

Lord Derby adds: “This is a new departure with a vengeance”. Chamberlain neither comprehended it nor apprehended it in this way. It foreshadowed an extent of policy and a method of parliamentary combination irrevocably rejected by him in advance.

Nor would it seem that the Radical leader was furnished with Gladstone’s full sentiments on the social question. Just when he was invited to Hawarden in the singular manner related, Queen Victoria, with unmistakable reference to his Bradford speech, reported that day in the newspapers, protested to the venerable leader of the Opposition against “the destructive doctrines which are taught”. “The country wants *calming* not *exciting*.”² When the visitor from Birmingham departs Mr. Gladstone confesses his misgivings to the Queen:

. . . He humbly concurs with your Majesty in viewing with dislike what in the days of Sir Robert Peel was universally regarded with misgiving as Socialism; but it is a subject of great concern to him that a disposition to favour it appears to have made considerable way with

¹ Lord Edmund Fitzmaurice, *Life* 1885).
of the *Second Earl Granville*, vol. ii. p.

² *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Second Series, vol. iii. p. 700.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

the two chief political parties in the State. He trusts also that your Majesty will never find him wanting in the disposition to distinguish between progress and revolution: and even that your Majesty may have regarded his recent course as in a manner dissociating him from extreme or dangerous views.

Mr. Chamberlain is known as the most active and efficient representative at this time of what may be termed the left wing of the Liberal Party; and Mr. Gladstone recently thought it would be well to invite him to Hawarden, with a view to personal communication, which has now been effected, he thinks with advantage. Mr. Chamberlain is wholly unaware of any communication at this juncture between your Majesty and Mr. Gladstone.¹

This shows very well a total lack of mental contact between the older and the younger statesman when under the same roof.

There remained the question of electoral results. This would be decided in a very few weeks. Chamberlain anticipated a clear Liberal majority, determined to proceed with British legislation whatever it might or might not do on the Irish affair; a position, he thought, which would make it necessary for Parnell to take less than he asked. Gladstone with profound concern anticipated a more portentous situation. He thought that against 80 or 90 members counting 160 or 180 upon a division the House of Commons would be unworkable. Chamberlain held that it would be quite workable if the two British parties refused to compete for the Irish vote or to accept its parliamentary domination. Gladstone by now was full of indignation against Pitt's Union and enthralled by the idea of an Irish Parliament. Chamberlain asserted full legislative union for the common affairs of Great Britain and Ireland; he held that any collateral parliament in Dublin would become first a rival parliament and then a separate parliament. Rather than that he would keep the Tories in. For other reasons he desired to remain out of office and to play a powerful part on the Opposition benches, unless the impending elections placed the Radicals in control of the House and the Government. He felt that Gladstone did

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Second Series, vol. iii. pp. 700-701.

not mean to retire. Fearing the consequences to Radical progress, he saw no present alternative. Above all, as to Ireland, Chamberlain at Hawarden was ignorant that his host was possessed. Gladstone offered no faintest adumbration of the giant scheme shaping in his mind. But we must remember that, however desirous, he was not committed to anything or anyone, despite the force of the subconscious current carrying him on. To be or not to be would depend on the polls. Six weeks would show. In evading the risk—it was real—of revealing himself completely to the Radical leader, and in underestimating that person altogether as a political factor, Gladstone made a capital mistake, perhaps the mistake of his life. He did not deceive, but, actuated by abnormal precaution through copious discourse, he left this guest in the dark—unlike Lord Derby, whom he had startled a few days before by full illumination.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
ÆT. 49.

IX

“The Irish business is not the first just now,” says Chamberlain to Dilke.¹ So little had he realised at Hawarden that in his host’s soul the Irish business was all and the rest nothing by comparison.

Suddenly he feels there is some obscurity; that it is thickening. “I had a note from Mr. G. this morning urging unity, and saying he had an ‘instinct that Irish questions might elbow out all others’. This makes me uneasy.”²

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

Hawarden Castle, October 25, 1885.— . . . An instinct blindly impresses me with the likelihood that Ireland may shoulder aside everything else. But I would beg you to revolve much in your mind the policy and duty, without me as well as with me, of keeping together the Liberal party till its list of agreed subjects is exhausted “or thereby”. (I am rubbing up my Scotch.)

This suggests that the “unauthorised programme”, so far from being the key to politics under the democratic franchise, is about to become an irrelevancy and that the whole of

¹ Chamberlain to Dilke, October 17.

² Chamberlain to Dilke, October 26.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

Chamberlain's campaign, for all its apparent power, may prove a bubble. At this the rift, not again to be closed, opens at last. The unpolished terms of the Radical leader's reply prefigure a whole generation of coming history:

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

Highbury, October 26, 1885.—MY DEAR MR. GLADSTONE, I cannot see my way at all about Ireland. Parnell has shown that he is not to be depended upon. He will not stick to any minimum even if he could now be induced to formulate another. After his recent public utterances he must go for a separate independent Parliament. For myself I would rather let Ireland go altogether than accept the responsibility of a nominal Union. But I think that a great number of Liberals—probably the majority—are not willing to give more than English Local Government. National Councils would have tried them very severely, and beyond that I do not believe they can possibly be pressed at present. If the Tories are in a minority they will join malcontent Liberals in resisting concessions. If they were strong enough to hold their own with Parnell's support, I do not know there is any limit to the price they would pay. In this case, however, the responsibility for proposing anything would not lie with us. On the whole I think the only chance is to let the Irishmen "stew in their juice".

It would be very desirable to unite the Irish and English Local Government Bills if possible, but I expect the practical difficulties are enormous.

O'Shea, who was here last week, says there are internecine conflicts in their ranks. Healy and Campbell (Parnell's secretary) actually came to blows at a recent convention. If we have a good majority it may be possible to divide them and secure some support for our proposals.

As regards Free Schools, I entirely accept your view as to the importance of Illingworth's opposition. It is not numerically great, but it represents the most active section of Nonconformists. I hope to be able to modify or even to avert it, but in any case all I ask for myself in this matter is full permission to express my own opinion by vote and speech.

As regards acquisition of land by municipal authorities, I should be ready to discuss details with Hartington, James, Harcourt and Dilke. I think we ought to come to an agreement. But unless the principle is accepted and some provisions of the kind introduced into the Local

Government Bill, neither I nor Dilke nor Morley, nor I *think* Lefevre, could honestly join any Government. We are absolutely bound by our declarations, as well as by our recent action, in such a case, to remain outside and bide our time.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

This is proof conclusive that the Hawarden conversations, whether in the woods or the library, had not brought them one inch nearer. One was full of the Irish Question and hardly considered the social question. To the other, as full of the social question, the Irish Question was second. One foreboded the deadlock; the other expected Radical victory. The guest was unreserved as always in his talk as in his letters. The host was unfathomably secretive about a policy and a course contemplated though not yet embraced. They were intent on different visions, full of different assumptions. So far as they discerned the same things at all, they looked through different lenses. On disestablishment also, a little later, they were in restrained but profound disagreement. These were two minds without one main purpose in common. There was an abyss between two natures.

Gladstone appreciated his visitor more than formerly, though far from enough. The words to Lord Granville are well known,¹ but must be repeated:

Chamberlain came here yesterday and I have had a great deal of conversation with him. He is a good man to talk to, not only from his force and clearness, but because he speaks with reflection, does not misapprehend or (I think) suspect, or make unnecessary difficulties or endeavour to maintain pedantically the uniformity and consistency of his argument throughout.

Unaware of the depth of their mutual misconceiving, they parted at Hawarden never again to meet as political friends. As the originator of the Hawarden visit has had the first word in this episode, let him have the last. George Russell records:

Unfortunately I had to leave Hawarden before he [Chamberlain] arrived, but he wrote to me on his return to Birmingham. Nothing, he said, could have been socially more pleasant than the visit, but politically it had been a failure. Gladstone would not budge an inch towards the

¹ Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 224.

BOOK
VI.

1885.

"unauthorised programme"; and, said Chamberlain, "If I were to recede the very stones would cry out".¹

Long before this last reminiscence was set down, the same chronicler remarked:

It has always been my opinion that after this acute disagreement Mr. Chamberlain could never again have worked harmoniously with his former chief; and that Home Rule was only the signal and the occasion for a severance which was inevitable.²

With the patricians, after the polls, Gladstone conferred at various country houses,³ but not with Chamberlain. The "prophet old" was blind on one side and dazzled on the other.

X

During the weeks before the elections the Chamberlain correspondence throws a searching light on the secret springs of politics both in England and Ireland, on the windings of intrigue, on the elements of more than one tragedy.

We have not seen Captain O'Shea for some time. Now he reappears. His personal hopes in politics are disappointed; he is a candidate in search of a seat; he seethes with anger, and his attitude towards Parnell changes; it had been expectant, it is now malign:

O'SHEA TO CHAMBERLAIN

Holyhead, September 3, 1885.— . . . As you know, my relations with Parnell are very strained. He asked me last month to shoot at Avondale, but I thought it well to refuse. In Dublin I had no opportunity of speaking to him. By the by, he did his business at the Lord Mayor's dinner excellently. He had had his hair cut and he wore a pretty "button-hole". He held himself up, and his condescending bow to the Lord Mayor would have been worthy of Louis XIV. . . . I must ask you to consider whether, in one of your forthcoming speeches, you could possibly manage to give me a lift. . . . What I want somebody to inform

¹ *Cornhill Magazine*, September 1914.

² *Independent Review*, November 1903.

³ Fitzmaurice's *Granville*, vol. ii. p. 466.—"The month of December was

largely occupied in conferences between Mr. Gladstone, Lord Granville, Lord Hartington, Lord Rosebery and Lord Spencer at various country houses, at Hawarden, at Walmer, at Chatsworth."

my deluded countrymen is, that although a reasonable man I am intensely Irish in sentiment and political design; that although not inferior in ability to other Irish members, I have been content constantly to efface myself in debate in order otherwise to gain substantial advantages for the Irish people.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

But by this time Irish Nationalist feeling with its whole force is set on the idea of the "Macedonian phalanx" in the House of Commons—a "pledge-bound party" moving as one under Parnell's leadership. All "place-hunters", "shoneens", "West Britons" are to be excluded. O'Shea is regarded as an undesirable, and he loses all present hope of a seat in his own country. Country conventions are being held to adopt candidates. None of them want him. On November 6 he issues an address bidding farewell to his old constituents in Clare. In describing an ugly row with Parnell—his stories, whether bitter or specious, never lose anything in the telling—he sounds a new note of vengeance:

Dublin, November 8.—Parnell called on me yesterday afternoon and began to mumble something about sorrow that I had not seen my way to contest Mid Armagh¹ and hope that an English seat might yet be found for me. I soon cut matters short by telling him that I did not want any more beating about the bush; that no man had ever behaved more shamefully than he had behaved to me, and that I wished to hold no further communication with him. He enquired whether I wished him to leave and I replied most certainly. He then crossed the room and held out his hand. I informed him that I would not touch it on any account. I do not suppose that he has feeling enough to have felt the blow long, but I never saw a man slink out of a room more like a cur kicked out of a butcher's shop.

Probably this magnifies the demeanour of the Captain on the occasion. But a fortnight later Parnell, keeping his set countenance, had to digest gall and wormwood. At the last moment he retired from his candidature for a division of Liverpool in favour of his potential destroyer. It was in vain. O'Shea, beaten by a very few votes, was soon to demand and

¹ If Parnell suggested this he was sardonic. Mid Armagh was thought to be, and proved, a safe Conservative seat.

BOOK
VI.

1885.

exact from the uncrowned king public humiliation of a more glaring kind.

Meanwhile the letters between Chamberlain and Labouchere are like audible dialogue. Labby does as much as anyone—though with a contrary intention—to estrange Hawarden and Highbury. Chamberlain is now convinced that he has not been frankly treated. Whenever he has that impression—though at first he does not “suspect”, as Gladstone acutely noted—it has always a deadly effect on his mind. It makes him, then, another character—ruthless, yet warier than Gladstone himself, though less seeming to be so. Labouchere opens just ten days after Chamberlain left Hawarden:

CHAMBERLAIN AND LABOUCHERE¹

October 18.—Labouchere.—Please don’t mention this to anyone except J. Morley; I tell it you as it may perhaps be as well that you should know what the little game of our revered G.O.M. has been. My own impression is that it is not likely to succeed. Just before the end of the Session, Herbert Gladstone came to me, and asked me to endeavour to arrange some sort of *modus vivendi* with the Irish. . . . The G.O.M. says that he is disposed to grant the fullest Home Rule, etc., but that he does not think it desirable to formulate a scheme before the elections. . . . Pray don’t say anything about the G.O.M.’s endeavours to square the Irish, but I thought it might be useful for you to know what he is aiming at.

October 20.—Chamberlain.—Thanks for your most interesting letter which confirms my suspicions as to the intentions of our great chief. . . .

October 20.—Labouchere.—At the bottom of the difficulty is the G.O.M. He still hankers first after the Whigs, and is not sound on the land question. He has the senile passion of an old man . . . to come again into office and is still bent on the difficult task of making oil and water combine.

October 23.—Chamberlain.— . . . For my part I believe in leaving the Irishmen to “stew in their own juice”. My proposal is the maximum that English Radicals will stand and a great deal more than the Whigs will accept. . . .

¹ This correspondence is largely above quotes from the copies in the used in Algar Thorold’s *Life of Henry Chamberlain Papers*.
Labouchere, pp. 238-243; but the text

November 10.—*Labouchere*.— . . . A week ago H. Gladstone wrote to propose that Healy and I should “by chance” come to Chester and that he by chance should drop in from Hawarden. I told him that this would be impossible, for it would be certain to get into the papers and that there would be an outcry about his papa negotiating. . . .

CHAP.
XXVIII.
ÆT. 49.

November 22.—*Chamberlain*.—You see Parnell has gone against the Liberals.¹ I felt certain he would. . . . My hope is that the labourers will lie courageously—promise to the Tories and vote for us. . . .

November 23.—*Labouchere*.—My impression is that Parnell has been carried away with the idea of holding the balance, but that if we beat the lot he will be quite ready to treat.

They did not “beat the lot”. That assumption, confirmed by the apparently close estimates of the Caucus, had been the pivot of Chamberlain’s calculations. Into the very limited number of the Radical leader’s tenacious friendships Labouchere never found his way, but there is no doubt that he was almost fanatically fervent at this time in his desire to see his idol Prime Minister, with himself in Chamberlain’s Cabinet. Harcourt, who revelled in this sort of intercourse, but managed it with finesse, was hard on the one man and superficial about the other when he commented on this correspondence: “Your Tempter has assumed the form of *Truth* which is of all disguises the most false. I don’t know a more false light anywhere nor a more mischievous will o’ the wisp”;² and again: “Beware of Labby. He talks to everybody, writes to everybody and betrays everybody.”³ Chamberlain liked Labby, read him, was diverted by him, and recognised a certain antiseptic quality in his cynical ridicule of society. But it was not as Harcourt thought. “I receive his advice with interest and amusement, but I do not always take it.”⁴ By now Chamberlain was wide awake and with all his wits about him. As we have often had occasion to notice, he had, when fairly roused, a close-lidded vigilance all his own. Not in the least danger of deception, he was leading on his voluntary informant, “the member for *Truth*”, to blab as much as possible.

¹ On November 21, Mr. T. P. O’Connor issued the flaring manifesto calling upon Irish electors in Great Britain to vote against the Liberals.

² Harcourt to Chamberlain, Decem-

ber 25, 1885.

³ Harcourt to Chamberlain, January 4, 1886.

⁴ Chamberlain to Harcourt, December 26, 1885.

XI

BOOK
VI.
1885.

Here we must turn again to Birmingham. The Radical leader amongst his own people was in the thick of an electoral struggle under novel conditions. His city had been divided by the Redistribution Bill into seven constituencies. He had decided to contest West Birmingham and thus formed a legendary connection. Through trials like nothing else in electoral history it endured for nearly thirty years until death did them part.

West Birmingham was one of the most populous and democratic of all the new single-member constituencies. His choice was determined by a kind of clan feeling. The factory he controlled in his commercial days lay on the edge of the division; a number of his future constituents had known him as employer and teacher. "Here I made my first entry into public life. My first political speech was made in a schoolroom in All Saints [Ward]. . . . It was through the kindness of the electors of St. Paul's Ward that I was introduced to local government."¹ In the area was "the jewellers' quarter", loosely so called, with many silversmiths. "A great deal of jewellery can be made in a very small shop", and these small manufacturers were numerous. Hence Chamberlain's later custom of making his annual attendance at the jewellers' banquet a national event. Skilled artisans abounded. Chamberlain could claim all his life after this, and often did, that he represented at least as many working men as any Labour member.

The elections were in one respect more puzzling than Birmingham had yet known. At first, as in most of the boroughs, its Liberalism showed a disquieting lassitude. Its popular masses seemed more apathetic than for many years. Imperial feeling ran high against Gladstone and his late Government just as anti-Imperial feeling had been rampant in the borough against Beaconsfield six years before. Now all the enthusiasm seemed at the outset to be on the Conservative side.

For the leader of Tory democracy himself had appeared in the town—the only man in England whose effectiveness on the

¹ Speech (June 3, 1885) accepting the formal invitation to contest West Birmingham.

popular platform rivalled Chamberlain's own. Lord Randolph Churchill, with Lady Randolph, in the flower of her charm, winning hearts and votes wherever she turned her gay tandem, dared to contest the Central division against John Bright, and made it an exciting duel. Hardly less stirring were the spirit and talent of the Tory challenger in the North division—Henry Matthews, afterwards Home Secretary. This time the struggle in Birmingham was to be anything but a sham fight. Majuba—Gordon—"knuckling down to Bismarck"—"meddling and muddling"—these names and phrases made Tory audiences rage and brought into them a crowd of working men, stung by national feeling, who before had always voted Liberal.

CHAP.
XXVIII.
ÆT. 49.

Bad trade gave impetus to the movement for "fair trade". Was Birmingham, as John Bright vaunted, still to be "Liberal as the sea is salt"? It seemed doubtful. The powerful engines of the Caucus had to work up the last ounce of pressure to drive against this head-gale. The Conservatives counted on winning three divisions, perhaps four.

Chamberlain, now superseding John Bright once for all—a thing so little to be suspected at their first meeting in 1859—had to be the life and soul of the whole Liberal struggle in the city. Opening his campaign on October 19, he delighted the gathering of the Two Thousand in the Town Hall. Cool and mocking in his manner, though warm in conviction that the building of Blake's Jerusalem would begin in a few months, he mocked Lord Randolph as much as their friendship allowed, ridiculed Lord Salisbury, incited the new democracy to claim its own, and dwelt above all on "the land" as the key of the social future. The rural question was the urban question too. The revival of agriculture would be a deliverance for the towns. It would mean to the rural labourer a new life; to the urban workers less competition for employment and a better home market for manufacture.

What most surprised him was the strength of the popular feeling excited by the Conservative campaign for Fair Trade and the difficulty of finding convincing replies to its practical arguments. "Fair Trade", he said, when the polling was over; "you have no notion what a hold it has upon the artisans. It

BOOK
VI.
1885.

almost beat Broadhurst.¹ I had to neglect my own division to fight Fair Trade in his; and it took me all I knew to get him in."

Chamberlain did his best, and it was admirable, for "free trade"; but the more he defended it, the more did doubt invade him. When he was President of the Board of Trade its permanent Secretary, Sir Thomas Farrer, always said, "Chamberlain is not a sound Free-Trader". Tariffs were rising abroad; the area of real free exchange in the world was shrinking. Free Trade undoubtedly seemed still good for large and mobile capital able as yet to adapt itself to any conditions—as, for instance, to establish factories inside a foreign tariff system, without losing the freedom of the English market, thus making the best of both worlds. But was it so good for capital fixed at home, exposed to foreign competition privileged in its own market yet on at least equal terms in ours? Was it so good for Labour? Clearly it was not true in Birmingham that a craftsman deprived of one job could so easily find another. In theory a unique elasticity of economic readjustment belonged to the insular system. No longer was theory perfectly supported by fact. Exposed to growing insecurity, the British artisan, excellent in one trade but bred to one only, was usually degraded when displaced. Agricultural cultivation was sinking or contracting at home under free imports, but extending and improving abroad under Protection.

Robustly Chamberlain argued against his doubts, but the more he argued the more he wondered. Through the Home Rule battle and other crises, he had no time for rigorous examination of these uneasy questions. They remained at the back of his mind. In a sentence, his absolute faith in free imports was inwardly impaired in the course of his efforts to think out a popular restatement of the orthodox case. But however dissatisfied he left his doubts in solution, not beginning to conceive for years to come that any great departure from the policy of Peel and Cobden might be possible.²

¹ Henry Broadhurst, a prominent Trade Unionist and "Liberal-Labour" member, afterwards Under-Secretary for the Home Department, was then

contesting the Bordesley division of Birmingham.

² Remembered from his own conversations with the present writer.

XII

Issuing his first address to West Birmingham (October 28), he said: "I am confident that the inclusion of the whole people in the work of Government will compel a larger measure of attention to those social questions which, as they concern the greatest happiness of the greatest number, ought to be the first object of Liberal policy".

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

His opponent was a Conservative working man, John Dumphreys of Bermondsey, promptly dubbed "Humpty Dumpty". Chamberlain ranged the town, speaking most days with unflagging vivacity and variety, slashing and chaffing; working otherwise night and day, though for some time he had felt the strain of efforts unrelaxed for months.

In support his Caucus proved itself still the superior machine, but had to exert all its resources. Liberalism at last was keyed nearly to the old pitch. Then a sudden menace roused it to furious anger. Just before Birmingham polled, the Irish Nationalist manifesto appeared, denouncing the Liberal party with ferocious violence and throwing into the Conservative scale throughout Great Britain the Irish vote, never before or since so well registered and organised as then. In Birmingham at least the stroke failed, yet was never forgiven. It helped Chamberlain soon afterwards to hold his city when he had to fight for his life.

The polls were held on the first available date, Tuesday, November 24. It was an anxious day. But the Liberal forces flowed strongly to the booths, especially after six o'clock when the factories were closed. Before the counting began Highbury and the Caucus felt secure about six of their candidates, but were nervous about the North division, where there was thought to be a chance that Henry Matthews might defeat a Kenrick. As it happened, the result in this quarter was the first to be declared, amidst wild cheering by the huge crowd round the Town Hall. Henry Matthews had failed by only 618 votes. A few minutes after there was mightier rejoicing when it was announced that Lord Randolph had failed—though by only 773 votes—to beat John Bright. By midnight all the Liberals were counted in. The cry was "We are Seven". Chamberlain had by

BOOK VI. far the largest majority of the day, 2764, and polled two to one over "Humpty Dumpty".

1885.

It was like him that before he went to bed he sent a message of congratulation to all his best workers. In a hard battle his personal and local success had been signal. But the news from the rest of the country he must have felt as the beginning of trouble.

Hardly in any General Election of our time have the newspapers been scanned from day to day with tension so breathless and protracted. For the rest of that week the Conservative reaction surged through the boroughs until the hearts of Liberals were sick within them. Then there was an astonishing revulsion. The county returns began to come in. In their turn the Conservatives were dismayed. They were broken, routed, in the shires as never before. Enfranchised Hodge was too much for his masters. When all was told, the shires overruled the boroughs. The new labourer's vote in the counties piled up Liberal gains until that party numbered 335 and the Conservatives only 249. Over them Gladstone had a majority of 86.

That figure was neutralised with ominous exactitude by the strength of Parnell's phalanx.

"Is not the cow doing wonders for us?" cried Labouchere to Highbury; "next time we must have an urban cow."¹ In the shires, the deep country, the "unauthorised programme" and nothing else saved Liberalism from total disaster. The downfall in the towns was widely taken as a blow to the Caucus and to Chamberlain. Not so. One of his enthusiastic disciples, a shrewd young Welshman afterwards as famous in his turn, Mr. Lloyd George, recorded in his diary the general Liberal feeling of the time. A year before he had written: "Mr. Chamberlain is unquestionably the future leader of the people". When defending that statesman during the electoral struggle, young Mr. Lloyd George, still only twenty-two, had found himself "tremendously cheered". He writes in the first days of the polls (November 26): "Further Tory victories. This is rather disheartening, I confess. It must be these Parnellites; besides, there is no cry for the towns. Humdrum Liberalism won't win elections." And again when the luck changed (December 4): "Great

¹ December 3, 1885.



CALLING THEM HOME

From the cartoon by Sir John Tenniel reproduced in *Punch*, November 21, 1885,
by kind permission of the Proprietors

Liberal victories in counties. Am convinced that this is all due to Chamberlain's speeches. Gladstone had no programme that would draw at all." ¹

CHAP.
XXVIII.
Æt. 49.

The Radical leader had made, no doubt, two mistakes. One hereditary, as we may say, the other creditable. The relative influence of dissent was still waning. Disestablishment, contrary to his lifelong belief, proved to be a dying issue under democracy. "Free education" did not stir the urban masses as he had assumed. Still, amongst the working-classes he had been the vitaliser of Liberalism amidst all its difficulties in the boroughs. But he was not the leader; the "Radical Programme" had not been officially adopted; and not being leader he could not overcome the odds—the wide democratic revolt on foreign and colonial policy and on fair trade; above all, the Irish vote which had turned the scale in some thirty urban constituencies.

These factors upset the best-laid calculations. Schnadhorst, after minute reckoning, had counted that the Liberals would secure at least 366 seats, and probably some others marked doubtful, giving a parliamentary majority of about sixty over "Tories and Parnellites" combined. The failure to secure a majority dependent on the Radical section, but independent of the Irish vote, was amongst the heaviest disappointments of Chamberlain's whole career. The basis of all his immediate plans had disappeared. Parnell will hold the balance of power—unless the two historic British parties can bring themselves to prevent it by coming to some compromise on Ireland.

Gladstone "sees what he foresaw"; he thinks the only solution is "a Parliament on College Green"; as his son had proclaimed in midsummer, when either already sure of how his parent's mind was trending or anticipating perfectly how it would move. In the same midsummer, owing to the chain of circumstances with which the readers of these chapters are acquainted, the Radical leader had broken finally with Parnell—both with his policy of legislative severance and with his method of manipulating the British party system to subdue or paralyse the House of Commons.

Chamberlain's words at Warrington were deliberate. "I hold that we are bound to take every step in our power to avert so

¹ Herbert du Parcq, *Life of David Lloyd George*, vol. i. p. 49.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

great a calamity. . . . If the country is to be safe we must have a majority large enough to render us altogether independent of the cynical offer which Mr. Parnell has made to any statesman who is willing to betray his country." We may like these words or not, but they utter something innate in his fibre as well as in his conviction. As he saw it, he had been juggled with by Parnell and kept in the dark by Hawarden. What Gladstone might do after these all-changing elections he knew not. He had his own plan. Failing that, he did not in the least see his clear way, but with his sword in his hand he was determined to be reckoned with whatever might chance on the road. His mood, though less theatrical, might be likened to the spirit of Schiller's scene. "Whatever the King's will may be, my will against the King's." ¹

¹ A free adaptation of the lines in *Don Carlos*:

" . . . Was der König
Mit mir auch wollen mag gleichviel!—Ich weiss,
Was ich—ich mit dem König soll."

CHAPTER XXIX

GLADSTONE'S THUNDERBOLT—A BREAKING-UP OF LIFE—THE RISK OF RUIN

(DECEMBER 1885)

AFTER the Elections—Chamberlain's Policy—No Surrender to Parnell—"Keep the Tories in"—Last Meeting of the Radical "Cabal"—Revelation of Mr. Gladstone's Mind—Hawarden destroys the Highbury Policy—Chamberlain faces Disaster—Keeping his Base—The Breach with Morley—A Career broken in Two—End of the Year of Dreams—A Changed Man—Alone and Resolved.

I

IN the second week of December the elections were complete. Within one week more the career of the subject of these pages was altered for ever.

CHAP.
XXIX.
ÆT. 49.

Even before the polls were over the prospect was strange and ominous. Liberalism could not obtain an independent majority. Parnell would hold the balance of power unless the British parties combined. His strategy had succeeded, not indeed to the extent he hoped, but to a remarkable degree. Though he could not give the Conservatives a majority, he could create a large one for the Liberals—if they accepted his alliance, conceded his demands, and remained themselves united.

To the Member for West Birmingham, as he had just become, that transaction under duress was intolerable. He had burned his own boats six weeks before when he wrote to his leader: "For myself I would rather let Ireland go than accept the responsibility of a nominal union".¹ Before that he had written to Labouchere in the same spirit:

¹ Chamberlain to Gladstone, October 26, 1885.

BOOK

VI.

1885.

Mr. G. himself was cautious with me at Hawarden, though he did not conceal that his present interest was in the Irish question, and he seemed to think that a policy for dealing with it might be found which would unite us all and which would necessarily throw into the background those minor points of difference about the schools and small holdings which threaten to drive the Whigs into the arms of the Tories or into retirement. But I agree with you that the *modus vivendi* cannot be found. First, because all Liberals are getting weary of making concessions to Mr. Parnell and will not stand much more of it; and secondly, that Parnell cannot be depended upon to keep any bargain. I believe therefore that Mr. G.'s plans will come to naught.¹

What now? The Radical leader, as he still was in everyone's eyes, and in that capacity feeling himself a full counter-power after the wide victory of his "unauthorised programme" in the counties, had the presumption to make up his own mind without reference to Hawarden, and in a quite opposite temper. Parnell, for all the eighty-six members now at his call, must not be allowed to become the arbiter of politics and to rush the Irish situation. If Chamberlain by hook or by crook can stop it, the Liberal party shall not take office at Parnell's hands and at his price.

Then? The Conservatives must be kept in for a time. They might concede some progressive measures—under Lord Randolph Churchill's influence they might yield more than the Whigs would have given; more than would be possible were the Irish Question allowed to shoulder aside British social legislation. It followed that the future of Irish government itself might be considered reasonably by the Conservatives. In six months Parnell would be compelled to abate his terms and to accept a National Council. Unlike Gladstone, the Radical leader thought that obstruction, if attempted in full force by the new Nationalist phalanx, could be successfully faced:

If we had a good Speaker with dictatorial powers he could stop Irish obstruction, and Parnell's power in Ireland would be shaken as soon as the people saw he was impotent in Parliament.²

¹ Chamberlain to Labouchere (October 20, 1885), referring to Herbert Gladstone's oblique enquiries since August into the possibility of satis-

fying the Irish party.

² Chamberlain to Labouchere, November 22, 1885.

II

We see how naturally, inescapably, this line of thought followed from all his antecedent hopes and declarations.

CHAP.
XXIX.

Æt. 49.

The actual result of the elections—the failure to obtain the independent Liberal majority for which Gladstone had appealed—made no difference to his view except to confirm it. To Dilke he writes when the county polls are closing:

It does not look as if the Tories would have the chance of doing much mischief—but I should like them to be in for a couple of years before we try again, and then I should like to go for the Church.

And to Morley:

It is really a critical time. We have to hold our own against the wretched cowardice and feebleness of our own party, but the game is in our hands if we stand firm.

At the same time (December 3), and in the same sense, he made a fighting speech at Leicester, where he was met at the railway station “by a great crowd of enthusiastic Liberals who followed his carriage”.

We have had a most unusual and extraordinary combination against us . . . the five Ps—priests, publicans, parsons, Parnellites and protectionists. Mr. Parnell makes it his boast that he has throttled the Liberal party. I think the probability is that before long he may have occasion to regret that boast. If it be true that he has throttled the Liberal party, he has throttled the one great machine for securing justice to Ireland. . . . I look forward with hope and confidence to the future. We shall in all probability have for a short time a weak Government existing on the sufferance of its opponents. If it does no mischief it may be permitted to live, but if it begins to do harm I think we shall make a speedy end of it. In any case, it is probable that the present Parliament will not endure for long. . . .

Some of our friends, or some of those who call themselves our friends, are already declaring that the election has been lost through the extreme programme of the advanced Liberals. I should like to point out in the first place that it is not upon the extreme programme of the advanced Liberals that this election has been fought but upon a manifesto which

BOOK

VI.

1885.

did not include one point to which the extreme Liberals attach the greatest importance.

This deliverance could only be read with indignation by the great man's devoted circle at Hawarden, where Chamberlain for a long time had appeared too mutinous and aspiring to be loved. By asserting in effect that Liberalism would have done better at the elections had it not been for the Whigs, the Leicester speech angered Hartington, who wrote to Goschen:

Chamberlain evidently has no intention of making things easy for a Liberal Government, and, after his speech of Thursday last, I confess that I should have great difficulty in sitting in the same Cabinet with him.¹

Little did Whig or Radical suspect what lay before them. In this way opened the most fateful month of Chamberlain's whole political life—the first half of that December was all confidence and illusion; the second half was dust and ashes.

Chamberlain invited to Highbury the Radical Five—whom Dilke called the “cabal” and Morley the “junta”. It meets on Saturday, December 5, and disperses on the Monday—and of that little Table Round no more will be heard in these pages. Lefevre was present with the three already mentioned. Trevelyan was absent, but his agreement on the main point was communicated in one interesting letter soon emphasised by another speculating on what will happen “if the Tories stay in”:

We shall get strong and good legislation for the public and a thorough holiday for ourselves. But if they choose to go out it will be a complicated matter. I earnestly hope they will decide to stay in.²

Morley in a mood of his own is inclined to leave them in for the moment, but with a view to bundling them out with contempt at an early opportunity. As a die was invisibly cast when Gladstone and Chamberlain said good-bye at Hawarden two months before, so now. When Chamberlain and Morley part at Highbury this time, little guessing what the following week will bring forth, it is a parting for good. If any were to prophesy to them that dreary lot, even at this moment they would think it

¹ Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. p. 96.

² Trevelyan to Chamberlain, December 13, 1885.

incredible. While both, without suspecting it, are politically in the dark, their affectionate companionship is still in the sun. As allies they will never meet again. In July, when Dilke had presided over the weekly meetings of the Cabal, all "the Five" had expected to be members of a Radical Cabinet in a future neither dim nor distant.

CHAP.
XXIX.
ÆT. 49.

III

Next and straightway our Radical leader, as for this last little while he still seems and feels himself, went to London to see Harcourt, with whom he dined, and found him at that moment the most ebullient advocate of keeping the Conservatives in office—allowing the Tories for a few months "to stew in Parnellite juice".¹ In vain Labouchere desperately urges Chamberlain to bid for power by an opportunist policy:

CHAMBERLAIN AND LABOUCHERE ²

December 1, 1885.—Labouchere.— . . . If G.O.M. still hankers after an alliance with the Irish it may be possible to arrange one, which would cause a split between him and his Whig friends. He was always wanting to know as soon as possible what could be effected, because he said he wanted time to gain over some of his late colleagues. I am not the least surprised at [the electoral] results. Putting aside the Irish vote and bad times, was it likely that there would be great enthusiasm for a cause which was explained to be to relegate everything of importance to the dim, distant future, and to unite in order to bring back to power the old lot, with all their doubts and hesitations, under a leader who was always implying, without meaning it, that he meant to retire?

December 3.—Labouchere.— . . . This afternoon I got a telegram from Randolph to say he was coming down and I have had him here all the evening. . . . They intend to give a *non possumus* to all proposals for Home Rule and they expect to be supported by Hartington, even if the G.O.M. goes for Home Rule. Salisbury is ready to resign the Premiership to Hartington if necessary, and the new party is to be called the Coalition Party. . . .

December 4, 1885.—Chamberlain.— . . . I was forced to speak yesterday

¹ Harcourt at Lowestoft. Harcourt's *Life*, vol. i. p. 542.

² Thorold's *Labouchere*, pp. 245-250.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

at Leicester and you will see I had a dig at the Whigs. I will drive the knife in on the 17th. Surely Hartington will not be such a fool as to make a coalition. If he is inclined that way, I should be happy to give him a lift. It would be the making of the Radical party. . . . I should warmly support any proposals for amendment of procedure which gave more power to the majority. . . . *P.S.*—We must keep the Tories in for some time. If R. Churchill will not play the fool, I certainly should not be inclined to prefer a weak Liberal or Coalition Government to a weak Tory one. His best policy is to leave us to deal with the Whigs, and not to compel us to unite the party against the Tories.

December 7.—Chamberlain.— . . . The G.O.M. is very anxious to come in again. I am not, and I think we must sit on his Irish proposals. It will require a careful steering to keep the Radical boat head to the wind.

December 8.—Labouchere.— . . . I have just got a letter from Herbert Gladstone¹ which I have sent on to Healy. . . . I have replied that it is very questionable whether any sort of arrangement can be come to with Parnell, but that if so, it will be necessary for "Herbert" . . . to let us have the maximum of concession. I doubt Parnell agreeing to any scheme which "Herbert" may propose; their views are so divergent. But suppose that he does—would it not be well to use the G.O.M. to settle this question and get it out of the way? If he agrees with Parnell, he will not long agree with his Whig friends. So soon as the Irish question is over, something might be done to separate the Whigs entirely from the Radicals—or at least something to cause the G.O.M. to begin those ten years of probation which he requires before meeting his Maker.

December 11.—Chamberlain.—There is much in what you say, but the fear is that anything like a bargain with the Irish would be resented by the English and Scotch workmen and that a Tory-Whig Coalition appealing to their prejudices against a Radical-Parnellite alliance would carry all before them. . . . I am clear that we had better bide our time and rub the Tories' noses well in the mess they have made.

Labouchere then visited Highbury and his host notes, "I told him plainly that I was not prepared to go beyond National Councils".²

¹ Herbert Gladstone said: "The important thing on which everything now hangs is the Irish question. Will Parnell propose a Home Rule amendment; if so, do you know, or can you

find out, its terms? The Tories cannot or will not satisfy the Parnellites on the matter of Home Rule. . . . What do the Irish members propose? . . ."

² Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

IV

At this moment Dilke caused or rather occasioned an explosion. It blew the Highbury policy to bits. When he gave public expression to that policy he did not and could not dream of the effect upon filial devotion at Hawarden. At Chelsea on December 12, Dilke argued that the least evil in the crass circumstances was to keep the Conservatives in office as a Government on sufferance. His own account of this speech has not hitherto been published:

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

76 Sloane Street, December 13.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN, Late last night I spoke at a private meeting of the Eleusis Club—our most extreme people. I spoke strongly in favour of leaving the Tories in, and was loudly cheered when I said that it could not be for the good of Radicalism that we should take office in a minority. One man spoke the other way—Irons, the writer in the Board of Trade, but only on the ground of danger in foreign affairs. I said that these were my sentiments, but that the circumstances were so difficult that they must not look on them as a pledge.

At this there was a hubbub in all Liberal Clubs. Dilke's speech was generally disapproved on his own side as premature and disserviceable; few knew how much lay behind it. Morley was one who did know, but his instincts were no longer in tune with Birmingham. Protesting at once against "a downright false move", he did not find a sympathetic listener.

CHAMBERLAIN AND MORLEY

December 13.—Morley.—I am glad we are of one mind about D.'s speech. It was a downright false move. Whether you want to be in or out, it is fatal to damp down party feeling, which will be needed again some day, and probably some day very soon. I don't believe the Government can last long. You called them caretakers. They were ours—they are now Parnell's. They will not find it very pleasant, and they will be sure to do something that we cannot stand.

It seems to me to be our business to hold them up constantly to contempt—which they well deserve—not shrill or importunate, but steady. We can deal with our Whig friends at a more convenient season. Meanwhile the enemy is Toryism—the imposture. I, for my part, hope

BOOK VI. that we shall support them in nothing that we can in decency avoid.
 1885. Let them stew, as Harcourt says, and show themselves for what they are.

December 15.—Chamberlain.—I am not certain that I agree with you as to Dilke. I object to saying anything pleasant about the Tories, but I think in principle he is right. It would be monstrous for us to bring in a Palmerstonian Government leaning on Tory support. Better far a Tory Government dependent on our good will. If Mr. G.'s manifesto is the be-all and end-all of the Liberal policy I am glad that the Tories are to carry it out. It is good enough for them—it is not nearly good enough for us.

On the same date he says to Dilke, "I am glad all Radicals do not share Morley's views". It is an eleventh hour; he does not guess that at this very moment something is afoot which will topple his plans between night and morning.

By this time Chamberlain was regarded at Hawarden as the ruffian of a plot, with Dilke for his mouthpiece. Keeping Conservatism in meant keeping Gladstone out. How could it mean anything else? Putting by Home Rule meant nothing less than extinction of the great dream now absorbing him; his forced extrusion from public life. His enthusiastic aide-de-camp was his son. That son received an urgent letter from Sir Lyon Playfair:

He had sat by Dilke at a political dinner. The upshot of what Dilke told him was that he and Chamberlain were in action for the shelving of Home Rule, which meant the retirement of Mr. Gladstone.¹ . . . To the establishment of a Parliament Chamberlain was strongly opposed. . . .

It was quite possible that without counter-action Chamberlain would capture the National Liberal Federation. That would gravely compromise Mr. Gladstone's position.²

Personal feeling at Hawarden magnified suspicion. Chamberlain was not organising any conspiracy against a great man idolised by his family. He was only expressing vigorously to all with whom he came into contact his total dissent from ideas which for his part he thought wrong and disastrous both for relations with Ireland and for the future of Liberalism. But misconceptions at Hawarden were human though exaggerated. Chamberlain's

¹ Lord Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, p. 308. The last seven words are evidently Lord Gladstone's com-
 ment—not what Dilke said.
² *Ibid.* pp. 310-311.

ideas, not prompted by a desire to eliminate Gladstone, would have had that effect.

CHAP.
XXIX.
ÆT. 49.

V

After Dilke's pronouncement Herbert Gladstone felt that in his father's cause counterblast was imperative:

December 14, 1885.—This morning a letter from Wemyss Reid on the tactics of the Radical leaders, especially Dilke, determined me to go to London.¹

There he communicated in friendly quarters the extent of his father's views. Never was dutiful son a less fortunate ambassador. In an enigmatic situation the press and the public craved enlightenment. On the night of December 16, the National Press Agency sent out a startling message. Next morning the *Leeds Mercury* and the *Standard* simultaneously confirmed the disclosure that rifted national opinion and was telegraphed all over the world. The revelation ran that, with safeguards for the unity of the Empire, the authority of the Crown, and the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, Mr. Gladstone was prepared to take office with a view to

the creation of an Irish Parliament to be entrusted with the entire management of all legislative and administrative affairs, securities being taken for the representation of minorities and for an equitable partition of all imperial charges.²

One sentence showed what kind of personal feeling had prompted Gladstone's son to action. His chief journalistic confidant was Wemyss Reid, who was personally antagonistic to Chamberlain. Reid's *communiqué* to the *Leeds Mercury* (and he it was too who told Mudford of the *Standard*) contained this pointed challenge:

The position of Mr. Chamberlain and Sir C. Dilke is uncertain, but whether they agree or not, Mr. Gladstone will go on. He feels strong enough to carry the scheme through the House of Commons independent of the support of the Radical wing of the party . . .

¹ Lord Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, p. 311.

² *Standard*, December 17, 1885.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

Some incidental inaccuracy enabled Gladstone to protest that the disclosure was a speculation. The nation felt at once that it was portentously true. Not easily can the effect be conceived by a later generation. Irreconcilable passions were unchained. Liberal sentiment for the most part responded excitedly, as Chamberlain had never for a moment anticipated, to the old leader's puissance and imagination—heroic at his age whether wise or not. But the utmost extent and strength of opposition were likewise provoked. Reserve and doubt were silent and deep amongst a minority of Liberals—numbering many thoughtful persons not Whigs—who might be sufficient in number to turn the scales. Conservatives and Whigs coalesced at last in feeling, and were kindled for resistance. Liberal disruption was decreed. Destroyed now by publicity was the chance of a non-party procedure on the Irish Question. The tragedy was that with Chamberlain's desire in this sense Gladstone in his heart of hearts agreed. At Eaton Hall he sounded the possibilities of Liberal and Conservative co-operation. "I think it will be a public calamity if this great subject should fall into the lines of party conflict."¹

Of Herbert Gladstone's irruption—pointedly anti-Chamberlain in feeling and purpose as it was—Morley judges, "Never was there a moment when every consideration of political prudence more imperatively counselled silence".² Harcourt's comment is the best:

... I have discovered to-day on the *most authentic information* that the *démarche* of Herbert [Gladstone] was a deliberate countermove to Dilke's foolish speech which, as you know, gave great offence to the Party generally but especially at Hawarden. At the latter place it was regarded and was no doubt represented as the outward and visible sign of a plot believed to be hatched at Birmingham to keep the G.O.M. out of office. The chivalrous Herbert therefore thought it his duty to defeat this plan, and took his measures accordingly. This you may depend upon it is the true history of this extraordinary and mischievous proceeding. It is a good illustration of how one folly begets another and one piece of mischief has the most unexpected results. If Dilke had only held his tongue "the fire would not have burned the stick and the stick would

¹ Lord Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, p. 396 (Gladstone to Balfour, December 20, 1885).

² Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 266.

not have beaten the dog and the dog would not have worried the cat, etc., etc.", and we should not have been in the very infernal mess in which we find ourselves, all at loggerheads because one man chooses to play his own game off his own bat. . . .¹

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

On the night of December 16—it was Wednesday—Chamberlain at Highbury learned of the announcement to be published next day. He was dumbfounded. His whole political existence was jeopardised. Had he received a sentence of death he might have been less aghast. Mr. Gladstone was prepared for "the creation of an Irish Parliament". This apocalyptic word came less than twenty-four hours before Chamberlain had to make an important speech in the Town Hall. To speak of the Hawarden "kite" is a most inadequate expression. The event in politics was like earthquake and eclipse.

The political lives of many men were never again to be the same. As for Chamberlain, nothing less can be said but that inwardly he was broken in two. He has to disguise that state. Where it is impossible for him or any man to see far, he sees one thing instantly with his born instinct like a military sense. He must play for time, time, time.

On the one hand he is convinced by Labouchere's letters that for months Gladstone has been sounding, hinting and approaching, while denying negotiation. On the other hand, he is surprised, wellnigh dismayed, by the sweeping effect on Liberal emotions of the Hawarden spell. His letter-bag warns him that the Liberal rank and file are likely to be hypnotised by the threefold appeal to generous imagination, to the spirit of epic adventure, to party enthusiasm. Their great Gladstone, in concurrence with Parnell, will take office with a vast majority of 170, or as near as makes no matter. So dream most of the rank and file. What can withstand it? Chamberlain's policy, "Keep the Tories In", has scant force now against "Turn the Tories Out". Chamberlain has to realise that the method, no less than the prestige, of Hawarden has been too much for him. Assimilating the lesson, he too becomes expert in the art of secretive strategy and gradual approach to decisive position.

¹ Harcourt to Chamberlain, January 4, 1886,

VI

BOOK
VI.
1885.

First, he has to think of Birmingham. Above all things, he must be sure of his base, if human ability can hold it.

That very morning, as it happened, he had received a letter prescient yet enigmatical from Bright. It makes him uncertain of his great colleague, whose name in this crisis may still be one to conjure with. If he goes with Gladstone . . . ?

FROM JOHN BRIGHT

One Ash, Rochdale, December 15.—As to Ireland—there are two lines—to refuse what is described as Home Rule in the shape of an Irish Parliament or to yield everything. It would be a blessed thing to get rid of Ireland in the English Parliament, and if England is not to meddle with internal Irish business, how can Irish members be permitted to deal with English or Scottish matters? The more I consider the whole question—the more the difficulties start up—and yet I try to judge it without prejudice, or if I have prejudice, it tends to favour something very like what the rebel party say they want. . . . I wish our friends had not forced us to this Banquet, or that they would be content to *see* the seven members “all in a row”. . . . I feel as if I cannot get on my feet without treading on somebody’s toes.

In these circumstances, Chamberlain’s speech next day at the banquet for the Seven Members—Bright could not attend—was of utmost significance for his life. The feast could not be put off. It could not have been more irksomely timed. He had intended to pitch into the Whigs and to proclaim in more defiant tones than ever that an advanced programme was the condition of future Liberal triumph. But what now? Staggered and jeopardised though he feels, he is dauntless yet must seem to trim. “The situation is terribly strained. The statement in the *Standard* is true, of course, and Mr. G.’s action is awfully compromising.”¹

Hence his address at the “We are Seven” celebration bore uncommon marks of composite structure and late revision. Half-temporising, half-challenging, it was a consummate piece of tactics. Between “Keep the Tories In” and “Turn the Tories Out”, he balances; he is in favour of large reform in Irish government; but he throws the whole of himself into his appeal for

¹ Chamberlain to Dilke, December 16, 1885.

national resolve at all costs "to maintain unimpaired the effective Union of the three kingdoms that owe allegiance to the British Crown":

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

Ah! gentlemen, I say to you that the lesson of this Election is that wherever Liberalism has been robust and thorough, and determined and definite in its aim, it has held its own. . . . I should like to see this Government drink to the dregs the cup of humiliation they have filled for themselves. . . . A weak Tory government resting on the sufferance of its opponents is for us a much better thing than a weak Liberal government. . . . Then, on the other hand, there are also strong motives for getting rid of this Administration. . . . I imagine we shall all be glad, we shall all feel it to be our duty, to turn out the Tory Government at the earliest possible moment that we can feel assured of replacing it with a Liberal Government with a large majority at its back. But I hope we are also agreed that we should not like a Liberal Government to hold office at the mercy of Mr. Parnell—or to lend itself to his avowed intention and declared policy to turn out one Government after another in order to make all Governments ridiculous or impossible. . . .

I see in the newspapers some account of negotiations which are reported to have been proceeding between the leaders of the Liberal party in England and Mr. Parnell. In some of these papers it has been stated that I myself was a party to those negotiations, and that I approved of a scheme which it was alleged had been agreed upon. As far as I am personally concerned there is not a word of truth in that statement. I have had no part in any negotiations; I have expressed no approval of any scheme; and I think it very likely that the rumours which affect other prominent members of the Liberal party may be equally groundless.

As to Mr. Gladstone, we know what his opinion is from his public utterances. He has said again and again that the first duty of Liberal statesmen is to maintain the integrity of the Empire and the supremacy of the Crown; but that, subject to that, he was prepared to give the largest possible measure of local government that could be conceived or proposed. Well, I entirely agree with those principles, and I have so much faith in the experience and the patriotism of Mr. Gladstone that I cannot doubt that, if he should ever see his way to propose any scheme of arrangement, I shall be able conscientiously to give it my humble support.

BOOK

VL

1885.

But it is right, it is due to the Irish people, to say that all sections of the Liberal party, Radicals as much as Whigs, are determined that the integrity of the Empire shall be a reality and not an empty phrase. To preserve the Union the Northern States of America poured out their blood and their treasure like water, and fought and won the greatest contest of our time; and if Englishmen still possess the courage and the stubborn determination which were the ancient characteristics of the race, and which were so conspicuous in the great American contest, we shall allow no temptation and no threat to check our resolution to maintain unimpaired the effective Union of the three kingdoms that owe allegiance to the British Crown.¹

This was a great speech in no poor sense of that trite term. Deep-laid like none of his before, it gained the fight for time. Dilke read it with distress for two reasons. First, it veered away suddenly from the policy of "Keeping the Tories In". Second, he felt that he had been led on at Highbury, and was now thrown over. For this he had exposed himself to charges of crudity, rashness, even disloyalty to the party and its leader. In his painful personal situation hard to bear was the blow. Chamberlain hated having to inflict it. There was no option. Everything had been changed in a few hours; there had been no chance to consult; it would have been suicide for Chamberlain amidst the sudden revolution in political circumstances to identify himself with Dilke's virtual declaration at the Eleusis Club against another Gladstonian Government. "I expected you to 'temporise'," cries Dilke, "but not to go right round." When he qualifies this in another letter it brings him a startling answer:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

December 17.—Dilke.—(Secret of course to you and self) . . . I will say what I have to say very briefly. I find no fault at all and think what you do inevitable. It is a little "rough on me" to have to be converted to your view and then converted back again (I mean as regards Ireland) so rapidly, but I saw both sides before and see both now. We last week sacrificed principle in my opinion to expediency (dissolution will smash us). I consider that we are returning to principle as regards Ireland, though I am hopeless about it. But for myself personally the situation

¹ Birmingham Reform Club's banquet, Town Hall, December 17, 1885.

is grave. I shall *appear* to have taken a line for personal reasons of a not very creditable nature and then for the same reasons to have got frightened and backed out of it. . . .

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

*December 17, midnight.—Chamberlain.—*Have I turned round? Perhaps I have, but it is unconsciously. Honestly I thought you went beyond us in your speeches, but I feel that your judgment is very likely better, and certainly as good as mine, and I should have said nothing but for the flood of letters I received. The situation changes every minute. The announcement of Mr. G.'s plans makes it much more serious, and I altered my speech somewhat to-night to meet it. . . . I would not put you in a hole for a king's ransom if I could avoid it. . . . *Finally, my view is that Mr. G.'s Irish scheme is death and damnation; that we must try and stop it—that we must not openly commit ourselves against it yet—that we must let the situation shape itself before we finally decide. . . .*¹

More presage of coming history rarely was packed into a political letter than in these last lines. The correspondence continues. Living for us again become the passions and mutations of the day:

December 19.—Dilke.—. . . You have not turned round a bit in your speeches, it is in private I mean—as to the *possibility* of supporting Mr. G.'s scheme. But your letters to-day are plainer and are in full harmony with my view.

December 21.—Chamberlain.—. . . Harcourt has been here raving against the "Old Man and the Old Cause". But he went away in better spirits this morning. After Hartington's letter I doubt if Mr. G. will go on. But will he retire? I wrote to him to say that I did not think the country would stand an independent Parliament. I cannot conceive of anything between my National Councils and Separation.

The Birmingham speech had served its purpose. Preventing Chamberlain from being cut off from his Midland base, it left him free to maintain an armed observance until mystification could be dispelled and all forces drawn into the open. Morley commented that he liked the speech.

It was the best that you could make under the difficult circumstances in which Dilke's rash utterance and Herbert Gladstone's mischievous

¹ The italics are the biographer's.

machinations have placed us all. You put the situation as fairly as possible.¹

VII

The important effect was that Gladstone emerged from Olympian clouds and manifested himself to Highbury. But his continued insistence on verbiage designed to drape the plain thing intended was now intolerable to Chamberlain. Over that set character "Mr. G." had no further power:

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

Hawarden Castle, December 18, 1885. Secret.—I thank you very much for your references to me in your speech last night.

In this really serious crisis, we must all make efforts to work together; and I gladly recognise your effort.

Moreover, reading as well as writing hastily, I think we are very much in accord.

Both reflection, and information, lead me to think that time is very precious, and that the hour glass has begun to run for a definitive issue.

But I am entirely and strongly of opinion that only a Government can act, that especially *this* Government should act, and that we should now be helping and encouraging them to act, as far as we legitimately can.

In reply to a proposal of the Central News to send me an interviewer I have this morning telegraphed to London, "From my public declaration at Edinburgh *with respect to the Government* you will easily see I have no communication to make."

Be *very incredulous* as to any statements about my views and opinions. Rest assured I have done and said *nothing* which in any way points to negotiation or separate action.² The time may come, but I hope it will not. At present I think most men, but I do not include you, are in too great a hurry to make up their minds. Much may happen before (say) January 12. The first thing of all is to know *what will the Government do*. I know they are in communication with Parnellites, and I hope with Parnell.

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

Highbury, December 19, 1885.—I am greatly obliged by your kind letter, and am especially glad that you approve of my speech on Thursday.

¹ Morley to Chamberlain, December 24.

² Chamberlain's note: "It is impossible to reconcile the paragraph beginning 'Be very incredulous' with Labouchere's account of the negotiations which at that moment were in full progress."

Speaking, as I was compelled to do, without complete information, I was very anxious not to do harm.

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

It is my earnest wish to be able to give you the most loyal support in any proposals you may ultimately see your way to make, but I am much relieved to find that you agree with me in thinking that it is the duty of the Government, which rests entirely on Irish support, to announce its policy in the first instance; and that the Liberal party is not called upon to make suggestions at present.

I do not expect any satisfactory result from the present Government.

If it be true that you have laid proposals before the Queen, which have been communicated to Lord Salisbury, there must have been, on the part of the Prime Minister or his colleagues, a flagrant breach of confidence; and it is evident that they have resolved to raise the cry of the "Empire in Danger", as the Church has not sufficiently served their turn.

Whatever may be thought of the morality of their conduct, I have no doubt of its wisdom from the purely party point of view. If there were a dissolution on this question, and the Liberal party or its Leader were thought to be pledged to a separate Parliament in Dublin, it is my belief that we should sustain a tremendous defeat. The English working classes, for various reasons, are distinctly hostile to Home Rule carried to this extent, and I do not think it would be possible to convert them before a General Election.

I fear that with the expectations now raised in Ireland, it will not be possible to satisfy the Irish party with any proposals that are likely to receive the general support of English Liberals.

If I am right, we must wait until Parnell has broken with the Tories, when there will be pressure upon him to come to terms with us, and he may perhaps moderate his demands. I confess, however, that I cannot feel sanguine of any satisfactory agreement.

With its prophecy of "tremendous defeat" and other cool hints, this letter to Hawarden may well have confirmed Gladstone's instinct. His former lieutenant was more likely to be an antagonist than an ally. He did not answer.

Already the Radical leader was not being treated on an equal footing. He soon knew of Gladstone's fuller communications to Hartington and others—"Granville, Spencer, Rosebery"—all

BOOK
VI.
1885.

peers.¹ He knew a little later about the suggestions to Mr. Balfour of a non-party procedure. It was what Chamberlain desired. But whatever, given patience and prudence, might have been the chances in this true direction, they were done for when the Hawarden kite went up and garishly advertised the advanced state of Gladstone's intentions. The more Chamberlain learns while Gladstone leaves him out of counsel, the more he tightens. Attempting to daunt Hawarden he asserts over much though far from bluffing:

CHAMBERLAIN AND LABOUCHERE ²

December 19, 1885.—Labouchere.—I wrote to Hawarden in the sense we agreed on respecting your views—keeping however a good deal to the vague. . . . Rosebery writes to tell me that the "revelations" are well received in Scotland and that there will be no difficulty there. Do pray think how very advantageous it will be to get rid of these Irish.

December 22.—The same.—I got a long letter from Hawarden this morning. The substance is, "Let the Irish get a positive assurance from the Conservatives that they will do nothing and his tongue will be free." This I send to Healy. I have been spending the morning with Churchill. His plan is this. Queen's Speech at once—in address an expression of confidence. Liberals to draw G.O.M. Churchill to get up and say that obviously he intends to propose Home Rule. If so adverse vote will be followed by dissolution. . . .

December 23.—Chamberlain.—Surely Randolph's policy will not work. A dissolution within a few weeks of the General Election would be very unpopular and indeed unjustifiable unless the whole Liberal party followed Mr. Gladstone in a Home Rule proposal. But it is clear he will be left in the lurch, if he proposes it, by the majority of the party. . . . I should have thought the Tory game would have been to go out and leave Mr. Gladstone to form a Government if he can. Unless he repudiates Home Rule this would be impossible—while if he does repudiate it he would have the Irish against him. . . .

December 23.—Labouchere.—Has this occurred to you? The Whigs evidently will not stand Mr. Gladstone's proposals. If you therefore were to

¹ "Of our late colleagues I have had most communications with Granville, Spencer, Rosebery" (Holland's *Duke*

of *Devonshire*, vol. ii. p. 100, Gladstone to Hartington, December 17).

² Thorold's *Labouchere*, pp. 250-272.

rally to them, you would clear the nest of these nuisances, and, as Mr. Gladstone cannot last very long, become the leader of the Opposition or of the Government—a consummation that we all want. . . . Suppose that the worst occurs—an immediate dissolution—the rural cow would still do its work, for it might be put that the Tories are really dissolving not for Ireland but to prevent the cow being given. On other, urban, cows Mr. Gladstone would be very much in your hands—for to get into power I really believe that he would not only give up Ireland but Mrs. Gladstone and Herbert. . . .

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

December 24.—Chamberlain.—I do not think the Irish proposals are possible. . . . There is much fascination in your suggestion of Radical policy, especially in the chance of dishing the Whigs, whom I hate more than the Tories. But it won't do. English opinion is set strongly against Home Rule, and the Radical party might be permanently (*i.e.* for our time) discredited by a concession on this point. We must "lie low" and watch—avoiding positive committal as far as possible. . . .

Christmas Day, 1885.—Labouchere.— . . . I place as the basis of Mr. Gladstone's action an almost insane desire to come into office. Now he knows that so far as *he* is concerned this can only be done by squaring the Irish. At 76 a waiting policy may be a patriotic one, but it is one of personal effacement. This is not precisely the line of our revered leader. . . .

December 26.—Chamberlain.—The G.O.M. is sulking in his tent. No one can get a word from him—he has not replied to letters from Hartington, Rosebery and myself. . . . There is only one way of giving *bona fide* Home Rule, which is the adoption of the American Constitution.

1. Separate legislatures for England, Scotland, Wales and possibly Ulster. The three other Irish provinces might combine.

2. Imperial legislature at Westminster for Foreign and Colonial affairs, Army, Navy, Post Office and Customs.

3. A Supreme Court to arbitrate on respective limits of authority.

. . . There is a scheme for you. It is the only one which is compatible with any sort of Imperial unity, and once established it might work without friction. Radicals would have no particular reason to object to it, and if Mr. Gladstone is ready to propose it—well and good!

But I am sick of the vague generalities of John Morley and the *Daily News* and I am not going to swallow separation with my eyes shut. Let us know what you are doing. . . .

BOOK
VI.

1885.

This ominous rejoinder, with its reference to Ulster, fore-shadows the line on which in his heart he means to fight to the death. He feels sure that he will defeat on that line any scheme that Gladstone in alliance with Parnell can contrive. But it may be a ravaging conflict, and there will be no joy in the battle.

VIII

Chamberlain was accustomed to keep Christmas with good cheer. This one at Highbury was the least happy he had known since he entered Parliament.

The days following were like cheerless messengers telling that alike in politics and friendship, hitherto inseparable, the former life and all its hopes were fast drawing to an end. His last obstinate notion of keeping the Conservatives in office somehow, with sureties for good behaviour, vanished like a child's castle of sand washed away by the tide.

He had supposed up to Christmas that the agreement of opinion and feeling between himself, Harcourt and Hartington implied the probability of such a combination of Left, Right and Centre as would quite prevent Mr. Gladstone from forming a Government on a Home Rule basis. We have seen how Labouchere, straining every nerve to draw the Radical leader away from the Whigs, takes him to the top of a high mountain and shows him the kingdoms. "Mr. Gladstone cannot last very long." You can "become the leader of the Opposition or of the Government—a consummation that we all want".¹ Is not Paris worth a mass? Sure succession to the Premiership—is it not worth all else for an ambitious man whose whole strength lies in capacity for command? When the prize is won, any temporary constraint belonging to the method of attainment will soon appear as nothing by comparison with the opportunities opened up to a leader of Chamberlain's initiative and resource. Labouchere follows up by a mocking hint that Harcourt, who would have been invaluable as a firm ally, seems to be "sitting on the fence".²

And in fact that hearty statesman's letter on Christmas Day

¹ Labouchere to Chamberlain, December 24.

² *Ibid.*

speaks with several voices. "I see nothing for it but to keep these people in as long as we can." But then:

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

I am fast coming to the paradoxical and hopeless conclusion that nothing but the grant of Home Rule will ever convince the English people that we ought to have fought to the death rather than concede it. But can we accept such a responsibility? From the moment that the Tories sold the pass to Parnell for office in June, it has been a lost cause.

A few days showed him to be wobbling, but with a motion edging towards Gladstone: "I foresee that it may be necessary to let him try his hand" (December 29).

By this time, too, Chamberlain was in the pain, or rather torture, of his most bitter trial—the rupture of one of his two dearest friendships. John Morley, since he entered the House of Commons, had succumbed to the spell of Gladstone's personality, and by degrees, as shown already in these pages, he had become in habit more detached from Chamberlain. Towards Irish Nationalism he had always been more sympathetic. For various local reasons his constituency of Newcastle-on-Tyne was more favourable to Home Rule than any other town in Great Britain. On the evening when the intimations from Hawarden were known to all men in close touch with newspaper offices, John Morley felt that he must follow the old chief whose standard had been set up by his son. On December 21 he made a speech in this sense to his constituents at Newcastle. He was all for the great adventure in the Irish Question. "Turn the Tories out" and face in all their hazard the consequences, though these might include "breaking a great party". On Christmas Eve, Chamberlain, sorely tried, expostulated in rasping tones:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

December 24.— . . . I am sure you will not mind my writing frankly my opinions. I disapprove entirely of your speech as much at least as you did of Dilke's. . . . I do not believe that there is anything between National Councils and absolute Separation . . . it seems to be most mischievous and inexpedient to raise false hopes by vague generalities and to talk of maintaining the Unity of the Empire while granting Home Rule. The time has come when we ought to know and say exactly what we mean—and if we do not know, we ought to remain silent. . . .

BOOK

VI.

1885.

I know that I cannot convince you on this matter or change your course. I have foreseen for a long time that we were drifting apart, but you will let me liberate my mind. I feel sure that nothing will affect our personal friendship, and this is some consolation, although it is a bitter disappointment to me to think that we are not destined, as I once hoped, to tread the same path in political life.

The time will come, and probably soon, when our differences of opinion must be made public. If I had been speaking after you, I must have protested against what I think the dangerous tendency of your argument. For the present I must lie low, and try not to commit myself, but I will not be dragged—even by Mr. Gladstone—into a policy the result of which I believe would be fatal to the greatness and influence of the country.¹

At this injudicious manner of rebuke Morley flamed up in the well-known reply given at length in his *Recollections*. Its pith is in brilliant sentences:

MORLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

December 28, 1885.— . . . The more interesting question, however, is not whether I was right or wrong, but whether I was so violently and outrageously wrong as to justify you in announcing to me the end of our political connection, and your intention of proclaiming the fact on some convenient occasion to the public. . . . Ah, but, you say, you have felt “for a long time” that we have been “drifting apart”. This amazes me. I should have thought that we had never worked together more cordially than during the last four months. And indeed it is not more than three or four weeks since you wrote to me in very kind and handsome terms, expressive of your sense of the way in which I had stuck to you. Frankly, then, I cannot conceive what you mean.

Excommunication won't be the death of me—but it will certainly destroy much of the relish of public life for me. On the other hand, I am equally sure that when your own day arrives, much of its satisfaction will be lost if you have let go one of your best allies on the road. I submit that you should not be in such a hurry to sever old political connections. As you know, I have no sort of ambition to be an admiral

¹ While Morley was answering this, another letter was on its way to him. Chamberlain writes (December 28): “Sooner than consent to what I fear Mr. G. is contemplating I would go

out of politics altogether. But I do not think he can carry the party with him though he may do much to break it up.”

of the fleet. But I'll be hanged if I'll be powder-monkey. I have thought, read, written about Ireland all my life. Here comes a crisis. Am I to be debarred from saying what I think—saying it, mind you, as I did at Newcastle, in particularly careful, sober, well-weighed words? Are the Tories and the Whigs to say what they like and I to stand by in silent acquiescence? Well, I won't. . . . When I read in the newspapers your threatened advertisement that you will "no longer be responsible for my debts", it will be time enough for me to consider. . . .

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

An admirable apologia, but now Chamberlain's reply is worthy of it. He has much the cooler insight into dispositions and consequences. His answer is sad and steady:

CHAMBERLAIN TO MORLEY

December 29.—The language of your letter convinces me that I have unintentionally offended you.

Otherwise you would not write about the "thunders of excommunication" nor protest with so much vehemence against being a powder-monkey.

When have I ever proposed to relegate you to that position? Have I not on the contrary done everything in my power, directly and indirectly, to contribute to your well-deserved advance to political power and influence?

On the other hand, when I find you differing from me on vital questions as *e.g.*—when you join the Tories in an endeavour to put out the Liberal Government,¹ or when you lean to a policy which in my judgment will be fatal to the country, I think that like sensible men we should recognise the serious nature of these divergences, and not continue to cover them up with the ordinary expression of kindly personal feeling.

I do not blame you for holding your opinions. Possibly you are right and I am wrong. I do not blame you for expressing them on critical occasions; and I should not respect you if you did not give effect to your conscientious convictions. But do not let us attempt to blind ourselves to the fact that on the most important issue which has arisen since you were in Parliament we are working against each other and not as allies.

¹ Alluding apparently to Morley's independent action on Egypt and Ireland in the late Parliament.

BOOK
VI.
1885.

Our past political intimacy and our position as leaders of the same section of the Liberal party makes the situation more delicate and responsible. If I thought that you had not fully considered the subject, I should implore you to wait the result of further discussion, but I am aware that you have as you say thought, read and written about Ireland—and that therefore it is your duty, at whatever cost, to declare yourself, even in opposition to your oldest political friend. We can't help ourselves, and if I may compare Tritons with minnows, I should say it was Fox and Burke over again.

The obligation which rests on you at the most critical moments to let the public know that you are not at one with your most intimate associates, rests also on them to reply to your arguments and to repudiate your conclusions. This is not excommunication; and on the whole it is more likely that you will turn me out of the congregation than that I shall expel you. What I foresee is that if we cannot heal the threatened schism, we shall not long continue to worship in the same temple.

Only one word more. Surely you must have miscalculated the effect of your words, if you only intended to go "a very little way" beyond me and to lay down propositions necessary for the project of National Councils.

Your speech has been universally interpreted, as I interpreted it, as an indication of your readiness to support Mr. G. if he should propose a separate and independent Irish Parliament.

If you did not mean this, you have failed for once to convey your intentions clearly to friend and foe.

This Irish business is a terrible test of English statesmanship. I am not so confident in my own wisdom as to be dogmatic about it; but it seems to me that the expectations that have been raised cannot be and ought not to be gratified—and if so it is incumbent on all of us, by firm and definite statements, to dispel the wild anticipations of a portion of the Irish people. Much mischief has already been done, and it will be long, perhaps never, before we shall get back again to what I should call the region of practical politics.

I observe that you deal entirely with the personal aspect of the question and do not answer my arguments, or tell me what scheme of Home Rule commends itself to your own mind. I keep turning the thing over, but for the moment I can see only two alternatives, viz.—Separation

and doing nothing. Possibly Mr. G. may still have some pleasant surprise for us which will preserve and consolidate our unity. I'm sure I devoutly hope so!

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

What Morley does not in the least understand is how it is with Chamberlain—that for him now, despite the hard composure he shows, it is all wild storm without and rending within. He feels that amidst utter peril to his political life—while his friend's career may be easy by comparison and very likely more prosperous—he will have to “fight through somehow”, as he used to say in the personal desolation of earlier years.

Chamberlain knew that Morley was gone, and he groaned; it wrenched his tough fibre far more than it hurt the other's less compressed nature, acutely as Morley too felt the severance. These were days that tried men's souls. Chamberlain perceived more definitely than any other man the coming fate of Liberalism. But even yet he does not guess how solitary and extreme his own personal ordeal is about to become. Dilke, he still thinks, is left to him as a political ally and confidant; though that last ally cannot be publicly effective again until his innocence is proved at the impending trial. Chamberlain, happily, does not begin to surmise that even Dilke's thoughts on Ireland are diverging from his own.

IX

Meanwhile questions more important than personal friendship have to be closely considered. Can the Caucus be depended upon by its maker? Will his own monster become his peril and repeat the tale of Frankenstein? Can he be sure of Birmingham itself? No, not sure even of that. Not yet. The main tide of Liberal sympathy had begun to flow strongly in favour of Gladstone. It was carrying furthest away from the Radical leader many of the very idealists who had been his most ardent disciples in the “unauthorised campaign”.

The dialogue with the Tempter continues. Labouchere still cannot conceive that Chamberlain will refuse to join Gladstone in order to supersede him. The member for *Truth* insinuates that resistance will be futile, and publishes in *The Times*, after consultation with Healy on behalf of the Irish members, an

BOOK
VI.
1885.

elaborate Home Rule scheme. It rouses Highbury to sharper hostility. Chamberlain reiterates (December 27) as to Gladstone and his course:

It is pretty evident that whatever else he may do to "crown his career" he will break up the Liberal party. . . . In my opinion Mr. Gladstone cannot carry his or any other scheme just now, and if the Irishmen force the pace the only result will be a dissolution and the Tories in a working majority. . . . I believe the true policy for every one except Mr. Gladstone is to "wait and see".

The great visionary at Hawarden could not see in this sense; and he could not wait. Like no man then alive he heard "Time's winged chariot hurrying near". In a letter to Labouchere, promptly forwarded to Highbury, Herbert Gladstone now declares of his father:

I don't think there is any fear of his doubting his strength. He is so convinced of what ought to be done that strength or no strength he will go forward or fall.¹

One stipulation, as "the old man" already knows, is certain to be fulfilled—that Parnell shall first turn out the "Cabinet of Caretakers". While our Radical is still arguing the more stubbornly that the heroic autocrat at the head of the Liberal party must be forced by his ex-colleagues to pause and consult, he receives from Labouchere the peremptory word passed on from Hawarden:

Chamberlain does not appear to realise in the least how impossible it would be for my father to adopt his policy of waiting. If the Liberal party chooses to break up over an Irish Parliament it cannot be helped.²

After that message, received on the last day of December, Chamberlain could hardly expect compromise. His position and views were treated as of small account. The coming of catastrophe was plain. His word to those around him was: "We shall be smashed to a certainty". That is unless the elemental strength of Mr. Gladstone's impulses and suppositions can be stayed by resistance within the party. Immediately after

¹ Herbert Gladstone to Labouchere, quoted in Labouchere's letter to Chamberlain of December 26, 1885,

² Herbert Gladstone to Labouchere, quoted in Labouchere's letter to Chamberlain of December 30, 1885.

the notification from Hawarden that Mr. Gladstone at any cost will "go forward or fall", Chamberlain attempts a strong move. He will suspend his feud with the Whigs, towards whom his antagonism up to now had been unquenched. For that purpose support must be sought in an unsettled quarter.

CHAP.
XXIX.
Æt. 49.

Harcourt is perplexed and hesitating. I think he is impressed with the danger of Fenian outrages—dynamite and assassination. For myself, I would sooner the Tories were in for the next ten years than agree to what I think the ruin of the country.¹

Striving to fortify Harcourt, the Radical leader proposes to that statesman a quadrilateral:

What is to be done? Are we to let everything drift till Parliament meets? I shall be in town on the 5th and 6th of January. If Hartington will be up then, I would meet him with you and Dilke. If we four were absolutely agreed we might summon Mr. G. to meet us and call on him to stand and deliver his plan. If he insisted on going on without us we might call—with him or without him—a meeting of the party and submit our differences. We cannot keep them private and it might prevent men from committing themselves, or from being gradually drawn over the precipice. . . . This would be the bold course and in my judgment the best. . . . If we remain quiet much longer Mr. G. will have the game in his hands, and even if he does not get a majority of the House of Commons he will utterly have destroyed the unity of the party.²

At once Harcourt passes on the suggestion. Hartington accepts and arranges a meeting at Devonshire House on New Year's Day. This is Chamberlain's last stroke of action at the close of 1885, a year crowded with initiative and vicissitude like no former twelve months of his career. When he opened it with the "Ransom" speeches and the plan of Irish devolution, he thought that 1885 would see the sunrise of Radicalism. In the same spirit of sanguine energy he had waged the "unauthorised campaign" up to two short months ago. Now at the end of December he was more than ever clenched, no matter what might befall; but for the first time in his political life optimism was lost in shadows.

¹ Chamberlain to Dilke, December 27, 1885.

² Chamberlain to Harcourt, December 27, 1885.

X

BOOK
VI.
1885.

This chapter is meant to leave a mingling of impressions reflecting faithfully the unexampled confusions, amazements, perplexities, prevailing in these last two weeks of December. Chamberlain cries to Dilke (December 27), "What are we to do? This may mean isolation for a long time."

Upon resistance at any cost, if things come to the worst, he is bent. Already he is shaping and sharpening his weapons—every argument he was soon to wield in debate. So far he is clear, but only so far. At the same time he is lacerated by dread of the break with what he had most cared for—with the mass of his party—with all the affection, pride, allegiance, so recently given him by the ranks of advanced Liberalism. Some momentary contradictions are to the credit of his heart and his head.

Not because his own inward resolve wavers for a moment, but for tactical and tactile reasons in connection with his party, he throws out various and inconsistent schemes turning upon "ifs".

"If" we meant to concede a National Parliament to Ireland, then let us federate the whole United Kingdom by adopting the American Constitution. "If" the more one-sided plan is to be applied, then, to diminish friction and danger, let us get rid of Ireland altogether, reserving such powers only as shall prevent that country from becoming a base for foreign aggression against Great Britain. Using that idea as a device to give pause to Gladstonians, he did not for a moment conceive it as a real alternative. The essence of his mind just at this outset was expressed in a simplifying phrase to Dilke: "(A) National Councils; (B) Separation".¹ Home-Rule-All-Round, strong federalism with State rights under one Supreme Parliament—this he still holds to be by far the best course; and that Parnell may be forced to come to it if the Liberals refuse to give more. But always he comes back to his inmost conviction that nothing but disaster incalculable can follow any attempt to deal in a hurry with this revolutionising business by means of a Liberal Government dependent on Irish support in a manner certain to be regarded as ignominious by the majority of the English people.

¹ Chamberlain to Dilke, December 26, 1885.

Gladstone and Parnell will not have his solution. He will not have theirs.

CHAP.

XXIX.

ÆT. 49.

Was he right? Before the answer can be given with certainty the future must yield up some of the secrets it still reserves after nearly half a century.

We can only say that his policy would have prevented Liberal disruption; ensured the speedy beginnings of moderate Home Rule; provided the best chance for a united as well as a self-governing Ireland; while creating for the whole United Kingdom, as in the United States, a federal constitution ordered yet democratic. The Conservatives, by Chamberlain's policy of "Keeping the Tories In" for a time, might have been brought to co-operate in the process just outlined. If Gladstone, according to his suggestions to Balfour, gravely wished to bring the Conservatives to an agreed measure of Irish self-government, his best course would have been to hold his hand and to allow the new parliamentary situation to develop before taking office himself. This was Chamberlain's desire.

In the present writer's opinion, Gladstone's retirement after the General Election of 1885 would have been best for the three great questions—the Irish question, the Social question, and the Imperial question alike. Best even for Parnell as well as for the Radical leader.

Chamberlain himself, when the old year went out—1885, all-changing for him as for the nation—we must conceive as sitting up very late, after his inveterate habit, thinking at midnight and after. The bells were as usual no doubt, but when the old year passed the whole of his former political existence seemed to end with it. He had opened it with boundless hopes. He had gone through fire and water—he had become the best-abused of politicians—for the sake of a better social order and the beginnings of Irish self-government. In summer Dilke's Premiership, with Chamberlain as the master-spirit in the Cabinet and the country, seemed no distant thing. Since then, the Radical leader had risen far higher. A very few weeks ago, despite all hazards encountered, Chamberlain himself had seemed more certain of succession to the Premiership than any man who never attained it. At the beginning of the "unauthorised campaign" the Master of the Rolls, Lord Esher, passed a note to one who

BOOK
VI.

1885.

was then Chamberlain's strong adherent, afterwards Lord Russell of Killowen:

Will this be the course of business? In five months Lord Chancellor Harcourt sworn in before me as Lord Chancellor to Mr. Gladstone. In ten months Lord Chancellor Russell sworn in before me as Lord Chancellor to Mr. Chamberlain!

Of all high hopes this crash was the end—one friend eclipsed, the other severed; the "Radical Programme" swept aside; the Radical forces certain to be shattered for many a day; every single support and connection lost or jeopardised. It was like the ground opening beneath him. An eager disciple like Labouchere had tried to frighten him for his good. Healy expressed not only the Irish view, but a wider opinion, when he wrote on the last day of 1885: "Chamberlain is ruining himself. If Gladstone sticks to his text he can easily form a Cabinet without him or the Mugwumps, and then where will they be?"¹

The feeling that loneliness was decreed against him had haunted his household life for ten years; and now even upon his public life the old fate of loneliness seemed to descend. The Queen disliked him, and wished not to have him for her Minister again. Tories, Whigs and the Irish party hated him. If he crossed Gladstone's path most of the Liberal party would hate him too. One satiric but cheerless reflection was that "the cow" did it. Had he not swept the counties by his land crusade, Gladstone's personal power to create the present situation would not have existed. And yet if he yields like some others to what he loathes, his sure prize will be the Premiership, as Labouchere pleads. He is not tempted. In all his own correspondence and papers there is no trace of an instant's yielding to temptation; nor has any trace of it been brought to light by other records of this crisis, minutely intimate as they are. Instead, a new and deadly craft of combat was entering into his mind; the thought of pliability never came near enough to be dismissed. But unless he yielded, an ordeal of "isolation", as he put it, was the certainty; total ruin, a close risk. Few men of any time would have escaped it.

¹ Thorold's *Labouchere*, p. 274 (T. M. Healy to Labouchere, December 31, 1885).

BOOK VII

JANUARY—JULY 1886

CHAPTER XXX

HOME RULE AND DISRUPTION—CHAMBERLAIN RESIGNS

(1886)

THE Shattering Year—Vain Efforts to stop Mr. Gladstone—Parliament meets—The Chamberlain Amendment—End of the “Cabinet of Caretakers”—Junction of Gladstone and Parnell—How Chamberlain joined the New Government—Ominous Beginnings—A Rending of Friendship—“Unlimited Liberty of Judgment and Rejection”—The “Lowest Office”, and the Collings Squabble—Chamberlain and Gladstone at Arm’s Length—At the Local Government Board: A Great Project frustrated—Home Rule and the “Enquiry”—The Prime Minister reveals his Dual Plan—Home Rule and Land Purchase—Irreconcilable Positions—A Last Scene in the Cabinet—Chamberlain goes out—Light on the Personal Questions—An Epoch-marking Resignation.

I

WHAT Gladstone wished all men knew. But could he succeed? Could he form a Government for the third time? Could he begin to create its conditions? Might not Liberal secessions be large enough to neutralise his necessary auxiliaries the Parnellites and prevent him from taking office? When 1886 opened, political uncertainties were like a dense mist in the morning hours before a battle. Thick vapours covered the field, but, while many of the rank and file were still dazed, the leaders of parties and opinions had no doubt about the imminence and might of conflict, though yet ignorant of how armies would be aligned or of the relative weight of numbers. Obscurity resounded with alarms and preparations. The Irish camp alone, doomed to a long tragedy, was wild with hope. The other and larger hosts were oppressed for the most part with care and dread.

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

It was a temper of pause that meant no shrinking. Emotion and conviction, as intense and deep as those of civil war, were about to rend parties, clubs, coteries, households, dividing kin from kin and friend from friend.

The nation's instinct felt, what everyone acquainted with Gladstone knew, that having started on his new course he would move with velocity beyond his own first counsels of prudence. Was it possible to check him by main force? Chamberlain was attempting it, as we saw, in a way boding no good for future relations. He wrote to Harcourt: "Mr. G.—in going forward obstinately without consulting any of us and without the least reference to our opinions—has certainly discharged us all of any obligations to him".¹

Following his suggestion of a quadrilateral for resistance, the meeting of Chamberlain, Hartington, Harcourt and Dilke took place at Devonshire House on New Year's Day, a Friday as the superstitious noticed. Apart from condemning the Hawarden kite there was no agreement, except that the Whig leader was empowered to ask Mr. Gladstone for more light upon his "views and intentions". The same evening Hartington wrote to Hawarden that the four were unanimous about the necessity for consultation.² Gladstone had made up his mind in advance that "no one in his senses would covenant to call the *late Cabinet* together".³ Now, his refusal was peremptory. As to the Hawarden kite and his son's indiscretions, he thrust shrewdly at Chamberlain without naming him—"the incessant and incurable leakages of the late Cabinet supply me with an additional reason for circumspection".⁴

II

Chamberlain's move to checkmate had failed. Yielding to the new Hawarden tone of secretive supremacy is further than ever from his mind. He is hardened and exasperated, but must wait perforce on Mr. Gladstone's will before devising other tactics. The dialogue with the member for *Truth* continues, and we must always recollect that when Chamberlain answers

¹ December 27, 1885.

(Gladstone to Granville, December 28).

² Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. p. 106.

⁴ Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. p. 109 (Gladstone to Hartington, January 2, 1886).

³ Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 269

Labouchere he knows that his words will pass through that intermediary to Gladstone's filial aide-de-camp:

CHAP.

Æt. 49.

CHAMBERLAIN AND LABOUCHERE ¹

January 1, 1886.—Labouchere.—No, I do not think that he [Gladstone] is hedging; from his personal standpoint he knows that his only chance of coming in is to get over the Irish and then to get over his own party. Waiting games may suit others but he cannot wait. . . . The real enemies of the Radicals are the Whigs, and they are essentially your enemies. It is a mistake to undervalue them. They have always managed to jockey the Radicals. They hang together; they have, through Grosvenor, the machine; they dominate in Clubs and in the formation of Cabinets. They may ally themselves with you *re* Ireland, but this will be for their benefit, not yours. Nothing would give them greater pleasure than to betray you with a kiss, for you are their permanent bogey. . . . All this is why I still hold that the Radical game is to go on with Mr. Gladstone on Irish matters, and to use him in order to shunt them [half-hearted measures] and if possible the Whigs—not that this course is not full of danger, but that it seems to me to present less danger than any other.

January 3, 1886.—Chamberlain.—The more I look at the thing the less I like it. Whatever we do we shall be smashed for a certainty. The question is whether it is better to be smashed with Mr. Gladstone and the Parnellites or without them. . . . One thing I am clear about. If we are to give way it must be by getting rid of Ireland altogether and by some such scheme as this. Call Ireland a protected State. England's responsibility to be confined exclusively to protecting the country against foreign aggression. England's authority to be confined exclusively to the measures necessary to secure that Ireland shall not be a *point d'appui* for a foreign country. . . . The difficulties of any plan are almost insurmountable, but the worst of all plans would be one which kept the Irishmen at Westminster while they had their own parliament in Dublin. I end as I began. We shall be smashed because the country is not prepared for Home Rule.

January 4.—Labouchere.— . . . I am perfectly certain that Mr. Gladstone is determined to go on, and that any idea of a Whig-cum-Radical demonstration to induce him to keep quiet will not avail. Rosebery

¹ Thorold's *Labouchere*, pp. 277-283.

BOOK

VII.

1886.

writes: "He is boiling over with the subject", and you know that once an idea gets hold of his mind it ferments.

January 7.—The same.— . . . I suspect that Mr. Gladstone will not give the necessary pledges to the Irish. They have an idea that he might get in by their votes and then try to make terms with the Conservatives and bring in a milk and water measure. . . . If this be so, how about a resolution in their favour—somewhat vague—which would win them over to us in case of an election, and which would not be carried?

January 8.—Chamberlain.— . . . I could not support any resolution at present. If it were vague the Irish would not thank us—if it were definite I doubt whether it would be good policy to vote with it. . . .

In fact, when everything depended on structure and specifications, and when as yet the general term "Home Rule" might mean any status subordinate or co-ordinate, procedure by Resolution would have been a futile manœuvre with no chance of escaping exposure in debate. Judgment would be determined by the merits and faults of the architectural plan, when submitted to publicity.

Mr. Gladstone, for all the stormy grandeur of his imaginings, will not commit himself with friend or foe by engagement or confession, until by righteous retribution the Conservatives are thrown out by the Irish vote which had kept them in. But he now intimates as from above that though he declines to receive any *posse* of his former colleagues, he is willing to receive them separately. Against this further sign of a new assumption of supremacy, unknown in the Liberal party so far—impossible in the last Liberal Government—our Radical rages but is bound to comply. The score is mounting up, but the reckoning must be deferred.

CHAMBERLAIN AND HARCOURT

January 6.—Chamberlain.—Mr. G. is evidently determined to go on *coûte que coûte* and to pay not the slightest attention to the claims or the wishes of his late colleagues. I cannot call on him on the 11th as I was advertised for an afternoon meeting of the Allotments Association. In no case should I be disposed to see him alone. It is really monstrous that our Leader should throw every obstacle in the way of counsel and should be taking his own course under the pretence that he is standing

still. . . . My present inclination is to take Mr. G.'s refusal to come up as a snub and not to make any further advances to him. We can discuss matters amongst ourselves and without him and take decisions from time to time. When he wants us, he will certainly send for us, but I am not certain that I should go to him. . . .

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

January 7.—Harcourt.—I can't agree that it will be a wise thing to *boulder*. That is a course which is never dignified and seldom successful. Besides there is a French proverb, "Il faut toujours reconduire la vieillesse", *i.e.* you should see it politely to the door. I am all for taking this line. I shall go on the 11th, not at all to be talked over, but to hear what is to be said and to emphasise the lions in the path and paint them as large as possible. . . . I quite agree that we should continue to take counsel together amongst ourselves with a view if possible to joint action.

January 8.—Chamberlain.—Mr. G. has asked me to call on him at 11.30 Tuesday morning. I am most unwilling to go alone, but cannot refuse his request. It is evident that he proposes to "noble" us in detail. . . . I hope the account in *The Times* of the Irish tactics is correct, but I doubt if anyone knows Parnell's mind—not even himself. D—n! D—n!! D—n!!!

"To 'noble' us in detail"? It was a rude colloquialism, but went to the root. Mr. Gladstone, bent to conquer in this supreme adventure, had to divide the elements of opposition within his party. With consummate craft—the word must be used not discreditably to this Ulysses—he diminished that part of his danger. He made sure of Harcourt—massive and pliable, one of the kindest and most generous of men in private relations, but as supple as a big fish in the political element. His visit was on Monday. Next Chamberlain paid his unwilling call on the veteran who was casting all their fates in this inexorable way. These two had not been face to face for three months since the Hawarden interview. How much water had flowed under the bridges since then! Now, they came not an inch nearer. As for information, the Radical went away no wiser.

Gladstone's mind in the next fortnight is hard to follow. At the possibility of a public declaration against him by Hartington he protests: "This is to play the tory game with a vengeance. . . . He will make my position impossible. . . . I for one

BOOK
VII.
1886.

will have nothing to do with ruining the party if I can avoid it.”¹ Yet the very next week, in the spirit of one of the challenges inscribed on the Hawarden kite, he foreshadows the party’s ruin and his own by his resolute reply to a searching question:

Immediately on making up my mind about the rejection of the Government I went to call on Sir William Harcourt and informed him as to my intentions and the grounds of them. He said, “What! Are you prepared to go forward without either Hartington or Chamberlain?” I answered “Yes”. I believe it was in my mind to say, if I did not actually say it, that I was prepared to go forward without anybody.²

But the Radical, for his part, had already declared an equal resolution at the National Liberal Club.³ There he presided over the banquet in honour of Joseph Arch, returned for North-West Norfolk as a representative of the agricultural labourers. Towards the close of the proceedings Chamberlain’s reply to the toast of his health enforced one word, “unity”, with unusual reiteration:

No one attaches more importance than I do to the union of the Liberal party. No one is more willing to make greater sacrifices in order to secure that unity; but there is one thing I will not sacrifice, and that is the union and integrity of the Empire. Our great leader has said . . . that in his opinion the widest possible local government should be given to Ireland which is consistent with the unity of the Empire and the supremacy of Parliament. To that declaration I unhesitatingly accord my support, but beyond that I am not prepared to go. . . . I am not willing to sacrifice the unity of that Empire which has so great a past and which I firmly believe is destined to have so great a future.

At this there were loud cheers in the National Liberal Club.

III

For the swearing-in of members and the election of a Speaker the new Parliament had just met. To what prodigy might it give birth? The lobbies hummed.

Lord Carnarvon’s resignation confessed the failure of an experiment honourable and chivalrous on his part. The Conservative Government, for its part, changed front with acrobatic

¹ Morley’s *Gladstone*, vol. iii. pp. 282, 283 (Gladstone to Granville, January 18).

² Gladstone’s “Memorandum”, *ibid.* vol. iii. pp. 287, 288.

³ January 16.

celerity. Mr. W. H. Smith hurried to Ireland and back, and discovered within less than forty-eight hours that coercion, so recently dropped, was again required, though to ordinary eyes there was no discernible change in the state of Ireland. On January 26, Ministers announced in the House of Commons that the Chief Secretary, after his agile inspection of that country, would move two days later to introduce a Bill for suppressing the National League and other dangerous associations; for preventing intimidation; and for protection of life, property and order. This challenge made it clear that the "Cabinet of Caretakers" must quit the premises.

CHAP.
XXX.
ÆT. 49.

Chamberlain was compelled to join actively in turning them out. Ministers wished to commit Gladstone and to split the Liberal ranks at once by a violent Irish debate. The Radical was the abler tactician and had already devised a flanking manœuvre. He recognised in advance that nothing could save the Government or restrain the eagerness of the majority of Liberals to take office in alliance with Parnell, whatever might happen afterwards.

A word here on the singular history of a stalking-horse. A fortnight before, Chamberlain, at the Westminster Palace Hotel, addressed the annual meeting of the Allotments and Small Holdings Association, with Jesse Collings in the chair. He declared in a speech full of fire and satire that Liberalism must now redeem the promises of the "unauthorised programme" to the rural labourers. The Amendment to the Address in this spirit was drafted by Chamberlain and Harcourt at the latter's house¹ in Grafton Street and put down by Collings. It ran thus:

But the House humbly expresses its regret that no measures are announced by her Majesty for the present relief of these classes; and especially for affording facilities for the agricultural labourers and others in the rural districts to obtain allotments and small holdings on equitable terms as to rent and security of tenure.

On January 21, Mr. Gladstone assembled at Lord Granville's most members of his former Cabinet.

¹ A. G. Gardiner, *Life of Sir William Harcourt*, vol. i. p. 560. This was Chamberlain's recollection. It varies from Dilke's account (*Life*, vol. ii. p.

205), who says that Chamberlain breakfasted with him and then drew the Amendment in concert.

BOOK

VII.

1886.

The leaders had met apparently without any policy, and the moment Chamberlain read to them the "three acres and a cow" amendment they at once adopted it without discussion as a way out of all their difficulties and differences.¹

It was a part of the "unauthorised programme". Mr. Gladstone hitherto had liked it not, and it carried the counties in spite of his disfavour. To dispatch the Government in the most convenient way he used the stalking-horse, but he had no more enthusiasm than before for the policy or its author. For this he would pay dearly in the counties before six months were out.

IV

The next day our man of decision, momentarily in a quandary, makes another move on his own initiative. He sends for Captain O'Shea. He places in the hands of that emissary, for communication to Parnell—despite the quarrel of six months before—a remarkably frank and cool-blooded memorandum. It must be given in full, for in its way it is a masterpiece of realistic analysis. It is at the temperature of clear winter compared with Gladstone's rapt fervour:

MEMORANDUM BY CHAMBERLAIN FOR PARNELL
(THROUGH O'SHEA)

January 22, 1886.—I am not at all clear that it is desirable to turn out the Government at this moment. Public opinion, excited by the intentions attributed to Mr. Gladstone and by the discussion which has taken place upon them, is not in a favourable condition for considering even reasonable proposals for any settlement of the Irish legislative difficulty. It would be a great advantage to have more complete evidence of the failure of the Government to deal with the crisis.

If they remain in they must make proposals for restoring order. If these proposals are inadequate they will provoke disaffection amongst their own supporters. If on the contrary they are drastic they will enable the public to appreciate the nature of the alternative which must be adopted if the idea of concession is absolutely rejected.

¹ Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 205.

A discussion on procedure will also be likely to make clear the serious nature of the situation and the weakness of the Government.¹

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

The state of the revenue will necessitate an extraordinary Budget, the unpopularity of which must fall on the Ministers proposing it.

For all these reasons the fall of the Government if it could possibly be avoided would be undesirable on party and tactical grounds.

It is evident that the Government are aware of this and are desirous of precipitating their own defeat. It is also evident that they propose if possible to force the issue on the Irish question in the hope that an appeal to the country would give them a majority.

If it be out of the question to maintain them in power, it would seem to be desirable in the interests of a fair solution of the Irish question that the defeat should be brought about on some other issue; and Mr. Collings's amendment² offers a favourable opportunity.

Mr. Parnell must judge for himself the line that it would be to his interest to take. It is impossible that Mr. Gladstone should give him the assurances for which he asks. If Mr. Gladstone were to come in and immediately propose a scheme of Home Rule it is almost certain that in the present state of opinion he would be defeated, and an appeal to the country would in all probability result in a Tory majority.

Mr. Parnell's language last night pointed to the land question as one of primary importance, the preliminary settlement of which was almost necessary before any large extension of local government could be conceded.

The question is would Mr. Parnell co-operate with a Radical or Liberal Government in the endeavour to make a final arrangement by means of some large operation of land purchase, without pressing for the immediate consideration of Home Rule proposals?

In any case these proposals would have to come in the first instance from the Irish party.³ Is Mr. Parnell prepared with a definite scheme? And in this case would he be satisfied to submit it to a large and representative Committee?

¹ "The new rules of procedure"—announced by Lord Randolph Churchill for the consideration of the House and evidently framed to cope with Irish obstruction in the future—"were in themselves startling and drastic enough to give a Ministry an excuse for resignation, if, as was hinted in some quarters, that was the design of

the Cabinet in asking for their immediate discussion" (*Annual Register*, 1886. p. 20).

² Really Chamberlain's Amendment.

³ Many Liberals advocated this policy after Parnell's fall and his attacks on Gladstone.

BOOK
VII.

1886.

Note especially this last-hour proposition for a non-party examination of the Irish problem. Chamberlain sticks to it that his National Council Plan is the only form of constructive compromise immediately practicable, and that any more sweeping project of innovation, whether defeated in the House of Commons or rejected by the House of Lords, will be wrecked at the polls after the disruption of Liberalism. In managing foresight the author of a document like this and at this date seems the hard-headed person amongst them all. Well for them had they taken more of his advice. Gladstone would have saved his party and his cause had he played a waiting game and left himself free to urge solemnly a conference of parties on the unparalleled alternatives of concession or coercion. But Gladstone and Parnell were as indisposed to make Chamberlain arbiter of the situation as was he to accept them as his masters. Both were bent to turn out the Government at once, brusquing all hazards. They accepted Chamberlain's method of turning it out.

The indirect reply to his memorandum for the Irish dictator came promptly; and significantly, not through O'Shea but through the member for *Truth*, with whom Parnell was now in touch:

PARNELL (THROUGH LABOUCHERE) TO CHAMBERLAIN

January 22.— . . . Parnell is quite ready—without prejudice—that is to say he does not absolutely assent, but thinks that he will, which you know with him—who is more hesitating than Fabius¹—means that he will. His lieutenants agree—although he does not know this. . . . He wants an understanding that if Mr. Gladstone comes in he will act on his speech and at once bring in his scheme for the Government of Ireland. . . .

Grosvenor (the Chief Whip) . . . told me that he would prevent the G.O.M. ever going for Home Rule. He said "You or *Truth* are making a great mistake. You assume that the Radicals constitute the majority of the Liberal party, but really the Whigs do." I asked him what would happen if the G.O.M. were to retire; he replied, a Whig administration under Hartington with you [Chamberlain]—that you and the Radicals would soon perceive that you were not masters of the situation, etc. etc.

¹ Labouchere derives this superficial view from Parnell's lieutenant and enemy, Healy.

I, of course, did not tell him about Collings's amendment, but it will be very difficult to get him to whip for it, and you will have to put your foot down about it. Parnell agrees, if they are to be bought off, that the Irish shall appear not to take much interest in the matter, but to vote up before the Whigs know what is to occur. . . .

CHAP.
XXX.
ÆT. 49.

I shall, I suppose, see you in the House this afternoon. Never shall we have a better chance, but if we do not use our chances they will disappear.¹

The Irish leader evades this proffered opportunity, and it was the last, of entering into personal relations with Chamberlain. Parnell's own power, and the height to which Irish hopes had been raised, made him the prisoner of circumstances. He could not contemplate a non-party procedure, whether he understood or not the predictive force of Chamberlain's warnings and the ability of their author to make them good.

V

Next night—it was Tuesday, January 26—the play within the play was enacted. The protest on behalf of the agricultural labourers was moved by Jesse Collings. It was opposed by Hartington and Goschen in the temper of their autumn speeches. Now it was supported by Gladstone with an easy breadth of approval, as well as by the Radical leader who found one part of his “unauthorised programme” so suddenly canonised. The Chamberlain Amendment, to give it its real name, was carried against the Government by Parnellite support—an ironic prelude to the consequences.

Members on all sides knew that the whole question of Irish policy was at stake, not “three acres and a cow”. Ministers were beaten and ejected by 79—a sign that Parnell might not long be the arbiter. For the majority was made up of 257 Liberals and 74 Nationalists. But the minority of 252 included with the Conservatives 18 Liberals, men like Hartington, Goschen, Sir Henry James and Courtney. The number of Liberals who did not vote was no less than 76. John Bright was absent.

After seven months' existence the “Stop-Gap Government”—there may be worse things than stopping a gap—disappeared.

¹ Thorold's *Labouchere*, pp. 286-288.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

Its record in general policy was excellent, but the grave public situation at its close was largely the result of its indecent insincerity on the Irish issue. At the same time Conservatism was almost assured of some more powerful future. Liberal abstentions were the writing on the wall. Gladstone, impelled by inward visions, was blind outwardly to some probabilities acutely clear to Chamberlain's less inspired but keener faculty. He writes at once to John Bright, "We have turned out a bad Government, and I am glad; but what of the future?" (January 28). What?

For all the rest of Chamberlain's life the next few days are critical in their bearing. The intangible factors, the *imponderabilia*, are all inauspicious for future relations with his leader. Receiving the Queen's Commission after midnight, Gladstone, next morning—Saturday, January 30—began to form his third administration. He sent for the man upon whose distinctive Radical policy the Conservatives had just been thrown out. The interview took place at the house of Lady Edward Cavendish. It was as disconcerting as momentous. The visitor was met by the surprising proposition that he, the social reformer, should become in the new Government—First Lord of the Admiralty. The national demand for a larger navy was rising. The Admiralty was at that juncture about the most embarrassing office in which the Radical leader could be fixed. This detail shows how unhumorously remote from promising method the Prime Minister had become.

Chamberlain said that while he must hesitate somewhat about that particular post, "I should not allow any personal feeling to stand in the way". His account must be given in his own words:

It was, however, necessary that I should understand his position in reference to the Irish question before I could give any answer to his invitation. I reminded him that there had been rumours of his intentions which he had contradicted and which I hoped were entirely unfounded, as if he had made up his mind to establish a separate Parliament in Dublin it would be impossible for me to follow him. Mr. Gladstone replied that he had not made up his mind about any plan or proposal at present; that all he had determined on was to institute an enquiry into the whole question and to see how far it was practicable to satisfy the demands of the majority of the Irish people. Neither he nor any of his colleagues would be pledged to any conclusion.

He then put into my hands the minute which follows:

"Secret.—I propose to examine whether it is or is not practicable to comply with the desire widely prevalent in Ireland, and testified by the return of 85 out of 103 representatives, for the establishment by Statute of a Legislative Body to sit in Dublin, and to deal with Irish as distinguished from Imperial affairs, in such a manner as to be just to each of the three kingdoms, equitable with reference to every class of the people of Ireland, conducive to the social order and harmony of that country, and calculated to support and consolidate the unity of the Empire on the combined basis of Imperial authority and mutual attachment."

CHAP.

XXX.

Æt. 49.

I told him that I had always been in favour of some enquiry into the Irish demands and had regretted that Butt's motion for a Committee had been refused by the Liberal party. I should therefore be perfectly ready to join him in such an examination as he proposed, but that, as at present advised, I was entirely opposed to the idea of an Irish Parliament and that I thought a good opportunity presented itself of renewing negotiations with the Irish Nationalists on the basis of the proposal for National Councils. I pointed out that he might come to an agreement on the question of the Land, of Education and of Municipal Government, and that these would occupy a considerable time before it would be possible even to consider the question of any more extended local government.

Mr. Gladstone asked whether I intended to prejudge the result of the enquiry which he proposed to undertake or whether I was in a position to give an impartial consideration.

I said that I did not consider I was committed to a final judgment although I thought it only fair to him to tell him what were my present views.

Mr. Gladstone then repeated his invitation, and said that in what I had told him he saw no impediment to my joining his Government.

He further told me that he intended to ask John Morley to be Chief Secretary.¹

At the end of this cramped colloquy the Radical asked a little time. He was granted a few hours, and had to exercise his thought that Saturday afternoon as actively as in any emergency of his existence. At six o'clock he returned. "I brought

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
VII.
1886.

him a draft of my written reply. At his suggestion I added the paragraph marked 'A' and the same evening forwarded him my acceptance." With respect to the proposed Cabinet enquiry into the future of Irish government, Chamberlain claimed and received nothing less than "unlimited liberty of judgment and rejection". The essentials of his stipulations were these:

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

January 30, 1886.— . . . You have been kind enough . . . to repeat your request that I should join your Government and you have explained that in this case I shall retain "unlimited liberty of judgment and rejection" on any scheme that may ultimately be proposed and that the full consideration of such minor proposals as I have referred to as an alternative to any larger arrangement will not be excluded by you.

(A) On the other hand I have no difficulty in assuring you of my readiness to give an unprejudiced consideration to any more extensive proposals that may be made, with an anxious desire that the result may be more favourable than I am at present able to anticipate. . . .

Ominous enough were these drastic implications—hard to match in the records of Cabinet-making. They were but the beginnings of antagonism temporarily disguised as collegueship. The older man had an edge against the younger; the latter with all civility never yielded a jot of his own view.

The next day (Sunday, January 31) they met again. Chamberlain explained his unwillingness to become the head of one of the spending and belligerent services. This led quickly to a telling moment. He used to recount it as follows:

GLADSTONE: Then, what office would you prefer?

CHAMBERLAIN: The Colonial Office.

GLADSTONE: Oh! A Secretary of State!¹

The Prime Minister raised his head and dismissed tacitly—without one further syllable of comment—Chamberlain's desire for a department which had become to him, as we have seen, a subject of intense interest.² The Radical at this slight controlled

¹ Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 205.

² On this account the South African statesman, Mr. J. F. X. Merriman, in an interview with the *Pall Mall Gazette* (December 1, 1884), had expressed

the "prayer" that the Radical Imperialist, Chamberlain, might soon become Secretary of State for the Colonies.

his anger. Gladstone's irritation is explained by a predicament. His long associations were one of the disadvantages of his age. He could not bring himself to part with his amiable but exhausted contemporary, Lord Granville. As public opinion forbade that septuagenarian's return to the Foreign Office, where he had been an unusual failure—especially in respect of Anglo-German relations—he was partly consoled by the Colonial Office, where he would be an agreeable cipher.

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

After that irksome instant the Prime Minister asked whether Chamberlain would go back to the Board of Trade.

I said "Yes", if he desired it, but I should prefer a change. The matter was left unsettled, but next day [Monday, February 1] I saw Harcourt and told him what had passed. In the course of conversation I said I would be willing to take the Local Government Board, as it would give me the opportunity of preparing the measure for Local Government which I assumed would be the first work of the Ministry.¹

Raised to the Exchequer—while his future rival, Lord Rosebery, became Foreign Secretary—Harcourt mediated at once, as in 1880, with good sense and good-humour.

The Prime Minister complied:

GLADSTONE TO CHAMBERLAIN

February 2, 1886.—In consequence of your disinclination to administer the great department of the Admiralty, I did not mention your name to the Queen yesterday in connection with it. But I am very glad to hear from Harcourt that you are willing to accept what is an office of less rank although with present prospects of much greater political importance, namely the Local Government Board. This is a much better plan than what naturally first came to me on the spur of the moment, namely your taking your old office again. . . .

But this epistle, with inexplicable perversity, went on to inflict another personal sting. If, as Chamberlain staunchly desired, his Sancho, Jesse Collings, became his second in command at the Local Government Board, the salary hitherto attaching to that subordinate office should be materially reduced. The petty provocation led to trouble.

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

VI

BOOK
VII.
1886.

For Chamberlain, recently marked out as heir to the Premiership, now President of the Local Government Board, the conditions in this administration were an arid contrast with his audacious entry into the Cabinet six years before. He was rather in this Cabinet of 1886 than of it.

How often and fondly he had thought of a time when he, Dilke and Morley would sit at the table together making common cause at need within the Government. Now, Dilke necessarily was banned. But for his misfortune he would have been Foreign Secretary; and Gladstone could not have dealt as he now did with Chamberlain isolated, and assumed to be as much weakened. True, John Morley, as Irish Chief Secretary, was included, but he was brought into the Cabinet as the Prime Minister's preferred lieutenant on terms making impossible the former political brotherhood. Had Gladstone designed to drive in the wedge between these two—which was not the whole of his motive but may well have been part of it—he could not have been more adroit.

Relations between Chamberlain and Morley had been irksome. They dined together once or twice and went to stalls at the play, but with the feeling between them—"Never glad confident morning again". On New Year's Day indeed Morley had done his part in allaying the flare of the altercation in December. He withdrew on one point his implied reproach—disparagement of his status in politics:

On the contrary, nobody could have been more zealous and untiring in encouraging me, in pressing me forward, and in urging me on to take a prominent part. . . . It is always a delight to me that *dignitas mea*, whatever it may amount to, has been *inchoata, aucta et longius propecta* not by three men but by one and that one yourself.¹

But the rift was in the lute, and discords issued. They clashed whenever the Irish Question came up between them. Chamberlain thought Morley deluded; Morley thought Chamberlain prosaic. Their political estrangement prefigured severances of friendship throughout the country.

¹ Morley to Chamberlain, New Year's Day, 1886, and Morley's *Recollections*, vol. i. p. 208.

Morley's account of what happened between them when the new Government was formed must be summarised:

CHAP.

XXX.

Æt. 49.

January 30.—Went over to Chamberlain at noon. Long talk over the news that the Queen had sent for Mr. Gladstone. Nothing could have been more truly sociable. C. said it was of all things most certain that G. would offer me the Cabinet. If I went in without him, it would be political ruin to one of us, and he thought it would be I who should be smashed. . . .

Sunday, January 31.—Was writing an article peaceably at home until one o'clock, when telegram arrived from Mr. G. asking me to call on him at Carlton House Terrace at two. I got there to the moment, and found him at his writing-table with no sign of fuss or hurry. He had to make to me, he said, an important proposition, and it was that I should accept the office of Irish Secretary. Nothing could have taken me more by surprise. . . . I told him that before accepting I should like to have some talk with Chamberlain, with whom I had worked on very close and intimate terms for many years. He seemed a little taken aback at the delay, but could not refuse. I asked only a couple of hours to consider.¹

In this agitating emergency of his life, Morley went in search of his friend and found him after luncheon at the house of a well-known hostess.² At the news Chamberlain, we are told, changed colour for an instant, and then became sombre in looks and words. He divined all that this inimitable dexterity on Mr. Gladstone's part would mean. But, neither weak nor small in a malign dilemma, he did not hesitate in advising his friend to accept. "I don't see how you could keep your self-respect if you were to refuse."³ Both knew in their hearts that their political lives must diverge. The very first as he had been to desire and predict Morley's accession to the Cabinet, Chamberlain in this ironical manner had lost a comrade. As an example of the spite of circumstance in political life it is hard to excel.

The next episode is burlesque; yet better than anything else it elucidates the psychological relations at this critical moment between Gladstone and the nominal lieutenant whom he could no longer regard as a follower. On the Premier's part tact was

¹ Morley's *Recollections*, vol. i. pp. 213, 214. Jeune, and Lady St. Helier.

² Morley's *Recollections*, vol. i. p.

³ Mrs. Jeune, afterwards Lady 214.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

the more advisable, but it was wanting. The episode is the case of Jesse. When approving Chamberlain's offer to take the Local Government Board, the Prime Minister attached an astonishing addendum:

I learn that you are very anxious to have J. Collings with you as Secretary. In this my first day of regular work I have not been able to get at the consideration of offices of that class. But your wish will go a great way, and I hope it may be possible to comply with it. . . .

I should wish to consider freely as to this office, and the corresponding one at Board of Trade, whether the Secretaryship ought not to stand at £1200 a year.

Again Gladstone may have been free from intent, but in the circumstances no intimation could have been more aptly devised to cut to the quick. Towards the blameless Jesse Collings the great man sometimes showed diverting antipathy. In approving Chamberlain's acceptance of one of the lower offices in the Cabinet, with Collings as his departmental subordinate, Gladstone solemnly proposed to subject the faithful squire to a special economy. At this of all instants he singled out for petty reductions two minor Ministers with a view to abating by £300 per annum in each case the annual expenses of the State. Of the two victims, one, Collings, as a spokesman of the agricultural labourers, had played a sterling part in the winning of the counties for Liberalism; upon the amendment moved in his name to the Address Lord Salisbury's Government had been turned out. The other chosen victim was Henry Broadhurst—who represented at that time the bulk of the urban Trade Unionists.¹

Amazed and indignant, Chamberlain protested. Gladstone persisted; and made the formal offer to Collings with the denigrating condition. At Chamberlain's instance that condition was refused by Jesse, himself incensed. For some days the ludicrous squabble seethed. So little did the Prime Minister appreciate either the Radical leader or his henchman or their ties that he imputed the niggling to them. He sent his Chief Whip to induce them to yield. Chamberlain requested Lord Richard Grosvenor

¹ At that moment Broadhurst was appointed under-secretary at the Home Office. contemplated for parliamentary secretary to the Board of Trade, but was

to tell Mr. Gladstone that the proposed humiliation was insufferable. Then Chamberlain turned to Harcourt, who at once intervened:

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

February 5, 1886.—Chamberlain.—Damn! Damn!! Damn!!! . . . Collings has got him more votes than all his peers put together and this is his reward. The offer has been refused. Grosvenor was sent to me by Mr. Gladstone to induce me to relent. . . . He has failed and I have requested him to tell Mr. Gladstone that his action makes me entirely doubt whether he attaches any importance to the presence of either Collings or myself in his Government and that I wish to reconsider my own position. Is it possible to act an ungracious part in a more ungracious way than Mr. Gladstone has done? . . .

February 7.—Harcourt.— . . . I need not say how much I regret that you and Mr. G. should have been personally so much at arm's length for the last week. Nothing can be so unfortunate for both parties, and for the Government. The cordial co-operation of you two is absolutely essential to its existence. . . .¹

February 8.—Chamberlain.— . . . When he first mentioned reduction of salary, I strongly protested and told him that Collings could not accept on those terms. Yet in spite of this he presses the reduction and pays no heed either to my wish or to the arguments advanced by you and myself. If this is the way he intends to treat me, it is hopeless to think of cordial co-operation and I have only to consider how I can honourably get out of an untenable position. . . . I do not believe there is another man in the world who is capable of such churlish economy. . . .

February 9.—Chamberlain.—Mr. Gladstone has given way about Collings *subject to your consent!* [as Chancellor of the Exchequer]. Ferocious Economist, I beseech you not to dock poor Collings of his scanty pittance and relying on your magnanimity and congratulating you on your unopposed return. . . .

February 9.—Harcourt.— . . . Why he should go through the farce of asking "my consent" I don't know, but for "ways that are bland, etc." However, all's well that ends well and I hope you will think no more of it. We have much need of cordial co-operation to work the ship in such dirty weather as we have before us. . . .

The Prime Minister had been in "one of his most obstinate

¹ Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. i. p. 567.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

fits". They were apt to seize him on the subject of small economies, and at this time in his private talk he lamented loudly that vigilant thrift had vanished from Parliament since the days of Peel and Joseph Hume. To Harcourt he says that he gives way "to Chamberlain's will; not to his reasons, which are null".¹ Closing the affair, Gladstone brings himself to show good grace, and his letter to his unbeloved lieutenant is not without pathos:

I have written to Collings about the salary. If I cannot convince you and him I shall give in. . . . As for me in these matters, I am like Lot's wife solitary and pickled on the plain of Sodom.²

Chamberlain notes, "I wish he had never raised the question". By this time the incompatibility between them, though still faintly disguised, was absolute. At arm's length they were, and so remained during the few weeks more that were to pass before they stood "at sword's point and in diameter", as Sir Thomas Browne says, and became fated antagonists to the end of political life for one or the other.

VII

Sir Algernon West was the Chairman of Inland Revenue and the Prime Minister's intimate. His measured opinion must be recorded: it never changed:

February 2, 1886.—Luncheon at Mr. Gladstone's, who asked me whom I should propose as Chancellor of the Exchequer. I humbly suggested Chamberlain, but he thought that the City would be terrified at his views of "ransom"; while I maintained that a few weeks of official experience would soften the crudeness of his views.³

What a Chamberlain Budget—never to be framed—might have been we are left to guess:

April 12, 1886.— . . . Mr. Chamberlain said I should live to see the day when finance would be the great question . . . but Mr. Gladstone overshadowed every financier now, and we were always niggling.⁴

¹ Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. i. p. 568 (Gladstone to Harcourt, February 8, 1886).

² Gladstone to Chamberlain, Feb-

ruary 8, 1886.

³ Sir Algernon West, *Recollections, 1832 to 1886*, vol. ii. p. 261.

⁴ *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 272.

More than a decade afterwards Lord Rosebery remarked, "How unfortunate was his [Gladstone's] preferring Harcourt to Chamberlain as Chancellor of the Exchequer".¹

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

Gladstone in his own note is a little below himself. "What Chamberlain's motive was I do not clearly understand. It was stated that he coveted the Irish Secretaryship."² This exposes itself to direct refutation. Chamberlain had no such thought. For one thing his broken relations with Parnell forbade it; Dublin Castle in the circumstances was singularly devoid of attraction. For another thing he was committed to the view and had just repeated it in the *Fortnightly* that the Chief Secretary should be an Irishman.³ But what of the suggestion more generally imputed that he expected to be Chancellor of the Exchequer and that pique on this account deflected his public conduct?

Exceptionally equipped for the Treasury, he would have taken it if offered with the willing assent of Harcourt, whom he had no wish to rival. But he would have used the power of the position in the Cabinet to assert more strongly his own opinions about Ireland. In these pages we have seen enough of his tenacious mind and character to make us quite certain of this. He was resolved not to go beyond a subordinate legislature in Dublin compatible with Home-Rule-All-Round. Nothing on earth could have induced him to accept a scheme such as the Prime Minister had in view. Had he become Chancellor of the Exchequer at that moment his speedy resignation would have occurred just the same, and with far more damage to the Government. A contingency so plain that for Gladstone to risk it was impossible.

Two questions have been justly asked. In this situation, ambiguous and full of incalculables, why did the Prime Minister invite at all Chamberlain to join? And why did the latter accept? These questions are not conundrums. There is no mystery about the answers.

Gladstone's personality had never been so exalted in a Government as now. In his third Cabinet he was at last omnipotent—free from the galling constraints put upon him in his

¹ *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West* (under date October 1896), p. 324.

² Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 291.

³ *Fortnightly Review*, February 1886.

BOOK

VII.

1886.

former administration by Whigs on one hand and Radicals on the other. For months with imperious temerity he had accustomed himself to the idea of dispensing with Chamberlain at a pinch. But he could not exclude the Radical Unionist at the outset without suggesting to public opinion that the new Government was wholly under Parnell's sway and that Radicalism itself was shoved aside. The Prime Minister was bound to defer conclusions, if he might, until he could expound his plan with overwhelming advocacy. Until then, far better that office of a kind not apt to increase the younger man's power should keep him in custody and limit his tongue.

Chamberlain in accepting office temporised similarly with a reverse object. His necessity still as since the Hawarden kite was to play for time and opportunity. He had to see before he could engage. He could not range himself with the Conservatives and Whigs, who were opposed to his positive policy both for Britain and Ireland. He was against their coercion. He was for large concessions to Ireland. Yet he would not go beyond a point. A more hazardous predicament in democratic politics cannot be conceived. It was everything for him to wait until the Gladstone-Parnell alliance resulted in legislative propositions. Then the Imperial safeguards, oracularly promised, could be tested. When the scheme in its details was laid open, Chamberlain would know what to do. He could not take issue on vague adumbrations. On an actual Bill he could fight at need with all his genius for dissecting criticism. Accepting the formula of Cabinet enquiry, he warns Gladstone of his disbelief; he stipulates for "unlimited liberty of judgment and rejection".

This by itself could not be plainer, but we have other evidence. Just after taking office Chamberlain wrote to John Bright: "I greatly fear that Mr. Gladstone is on another tack—if so I shall not be able to sail with him for long".¹

VIII

A few words here must be sufficient for departmental work during his almost phantom tenure of the Local Government Board. He did not at first conceive that Liberalism would stake

¹ Chamberlain to John Bright, February 5, 1886.

everything on an Irish appeal without doing something for the British people, and especially for the agricultural labourers in the sense of his amendment to the Address.

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

Immediately on coming into office the Cabinet agreed that he should prepare a Local Government Bill. "No instructions whatever were given me as to details."¹ Continuously until his resignation he applied himself to this big task. Though embodying ideas dating from the recent time when Dilke had the same department, he drew a bigger design. Chamberlain's Bill would have established County Councils, District Councils, Parish Councils. He would have given "to one or other of them" the powers of the magistrates as to licensing and some control over existing licences. Compensation was provided if these were taken away for other causes than abuse. Further, in the spirit of the "unauthorised programme", he included powers to purchase land for allotments. The administration of local charities was to be taken over by the new bodies.² It would have been the greatest measure of its kind since the reform of the municipal corporations half a century before; but it remained a project on paper. Chamberlain might as well have amused himself in less strenuous ways. The Bill never came before the Cabinet.³

While he was at work on it unemployment and Socialism together were heard of in a conjunction which for several days looked alarming. Inflammatory harangues in Trafalgar Square were followed by rioting and wrecking in the West End. The President of the Local Government Board sent out a circular charging the Poor Law Guardians to show sympathy as well as caution in administering relief.

IX

Meanwhile what of the real question? What of the "Cabinet" enquiry into Home Rule? So far as concerned Chamberlain, enquiry proved an empty name, and he soon felt sure that he and the Prime Minister could not hold together for many weeks.

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

² All these details are from Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

³ As an example of the scope and activity of Chamberlain's mind it must be mentioned that, in his first weeks

of office, he submitted to Lord Rosebery a remarkable proposal for the extensive development of Chinese railways by British enterprise. In a subsequent chapter we shall have to return to this scheme.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

At the outset he was not utterly without hope that disruption might be avoided. His own critical power might tell in the Cabinet. Parnell's terms might prove too high. With the aid of Harcourt, Childers, Rosebery and Trevelyan, might there not be a chance to modify extreme proposals? The first trial of Dilke's case was just about to come on, and, were he exonerated, as his friend hoped and prayed, his return to the Cabinet might make all the difference. At least the terms on which Chamberlain had been invited to join the Government entitled him to expect, as he did, that he would be seriously consulted, whether his opinions were taken into further account or not. For a moment it seemed that Ministerial proceedings and relations would take that normal course. Then came a silence—unexplained—more and more ominous because prolonged.

As soon as possible after the Government was formed Gladstone wrote from Mentmore:

I have come down here for a few days, mainly to lessen the strain on my voice, which has been going back. But the strain of last week is beginning to remit, and other subjects of thought to come on. Prominent among them is the subject of your ideas about Ireland . . . by the end of the week, say on Saturday morning, if you are then ready, I should like to have a good long exposition from you—in time for your conveniently going home, as I think you often do.¹

This seemed friendly, almost promising.

The conversation took place at Downing Street on Saturday morning, February 13.² That it would be the last of its kind the visitor when he went away had no inkling.

He asked me for my views. . . . I urged him to deal first with the Irish land question, and then with education and municipal and county government, leaving anything more entirely for future consideration.³

This implied the break with Parnell. We may imagine that the Prime Minister raised his eyebrows.

Mr. Gladstone then asked me whether I had any views as to the proper solution of the land question. I told him that I had never formulated them although I had some general notions.

¹ Gladstone to Chamberlain, February 8, 1886.

² The day before, the first trial of

Dilke's case had come to the issue which proved disastrous.

³ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

He was then requested to put the notions into writing, and agreed. This was the end of the talk, and in the Prime Minister's mind must have been the end of much else.¹

CHAP.

XXX.

Æt. 49.

At once Chamberlain wrote and sent in a memorandum sketching a scheme of land purchase in Ireland. A Central Board, elective and representative, was to be created to administer the scheme. County Councils were to be established throughout Ireland. Chamberlain assumed that further discussion would take place on the basis of this document. It was circulated to the Cabinet. No further notice was taken of it there. Framed hastily as a draft and in confidence, and the more vulnerable in details, the memorandum afterwards was unfairly used against its author, but it plays no further part in these pages.

This Radical critic in the Cabinet had shown now that he was not malleable in any part of his mind and was adamant in refusing to contemplate any measure that the Irish party could accept. To-day we can understand them both. We can understand fairly and fully why Gladstone made no further attempt to take him into confidence, but instead kept him out of it. The bridge was broken between them in mid-February.

Chamberlain did not realise this at the moment. On the contrary, he thought that he had renewed effectual contact with the Prime Minister. After the last amicable conversation he was ever to have in Downing Street with that majestic personage, he remarked to Labouchere:

February 15, 1886.—As regards our future policy I can say nothing at present, but I think closer inspection of the difficulties in the way has brought Mr. Gladstone nearer to me than he was when he first came to London. If Parnell is impracticable, my hope is that we may all agree to give way to the Tories and let them do the coercion which will then be necessary. They will be supported for this purpose by a clear majority in the country and probably in the House. As for passing Home Rule resolutions at the present time I utterly disbelieve in its possibility.

¹ Chamberlain, fifteen years after, seems to have referred to this conversation. He said to Mr. Gladstone, "I think it my duty to tell you what is my sincere and honest conviction, that if you should decide to introduce a measure to establish a separate parliament in Ireland, you will be beaten in the House and you will be beaten

in the country". Mr. Gladstone protested that he would never appeal to the country on such a matter. "I would not take that responsibility, knowing it would break up the Liberal party, that it would dissolve old friendships and be a calamity" (July 11, 1901, Liberal Unionist dinner).

BOOK
VII.
1886.

This implacable intimation may have become known to No. 10 Downing Street and may have played its part in bringing about, in mid-February, the final cessation of real intercourse between the Prime Minister and his contumacious President of the Local Government Board.

A week passed without a sign. Four weeks passed. Chamberlain was still ignored. He had no further private talk with the Prime Minister on Irish policy. On that subject no discussion whatever took place in the Cabinet until the very day (March 13) when Chamberlain, resuming the initiative proper to his character, determined to bring a false situation to a speedy end and to challenge at all costs Gladstone's autocracy.

By the beginning of March, he knew that Cabinet "Inquiry", in his sense of the term, was neither intended nor possible. In essentials the case was prejudged. The Irish vote being dominant, the only real enquiry was Gladstone's own, by John Morley's agency, into Parnell's mind. "From the first the Irish leader was in free and constant communication with the Chief Secretary."¹ Lord Spencer had more weight with Gladstone in Irish matters than all the rest of the Cabinet together. He at least was fully consulted, but in order to confirm a policy preconceived in the main, not to question it. By comparison with the fettered conditions of 1880-85, the Prime Minister was, and meant to be, absolute. So far from being given any chance to cope with him in the Cabinet before his intentions were complete, Chamberlain saw, well before the Ides of March, that for their convenience they were trying to keep him in custody. Though a statesman and a born leader who, independent of them all, had lately shown unsurpassed power of appeal to the country, as a Minister in this Government he was in a state of preventive detention—almost of solitary confinement. Sidelights show how through the weeks of suppression the nature of this great fighter worked up to the irrevocable act:

March 3, 1886.—*Lady Stanley's Diary*.²—If Gladstone gives Ireland a separate Parliament, Mr. Trevelyan it is supposed will resign. . . . Mr.

¹ Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 304.

² Afterwards wife of the explorer, H. M. Stanley; then Miss Dorothy Tennant. A gifted and attractive figure in the society of that day, she met

frequently most of the eminent politicians. Before her death she placed extracts from her diary at the disposal of the present writer.

Chamberlain will also withdraw. He also is known to favour great increase of Local Self-Government for Ireland—but Home Rule—never! . . . The great piece has not yet commenced. . . . Sir C. Dilke's public career is ended. But Chamberlain will ride on to fame alone and unaided.

CHAP.
XXX.
ÆT. 49.

March 5, 1886.—Chamberlain to Morley.—Trevelyan told me that he had heard from you that Mr. Gladstone had propounded a scheme of Home Rule—that it was very drastic—that it satisfied your views and that it would probably entail his [Trevelyan's] resignation. . . . I need not point out that all this is in direct contradiction to the Minute circulated by Mr. G. this morning in which he denies the statements of the Press Association and says that he has no plan at present prepared. . . .

March 7, 1886.—Morley to Chamberlain.—*Secret.*—It is best, I think, that I should put in writing my disclaimer. It is impossible that I should have said that a "scheme had been prepared" for I know it has not. . . .

March 8, 1886.—Chamberlain to his brother Arthur.— . . . As regards Ireland I have quite made up my mind—indeed I have never felt the slightest hesitation. If Mr. G.'s scheme goes too far as I expect it will I shall leave him. The immediate result will be considerable unpopularity and temporary estrangement from the Radical party. . . . I shall be left almost alone for a time. I cannot of course work with the Tories, and Hartington is quite as much hostile to my Radical views as to Mr. G.'s Irish plans. . . .

All political London was talking of the imminent eruption. Working prodigiously against the clock in spite of his age, preparing at a feverish speed two fateful and complicated measures of constructive legislation, Gladstone realised that he must begin to open his mind. On March 7 he communicated to his Chancellor of the Exchequer, but not to his President of the Local Government Board, the outline of his Irish plans, political and agrarian.¹ Chamberlain, as we have just seen in the letter to his brother, girded for battle.

X

At the end of that week, on Saturday, March 13, the Cabinet assembled to look the Irish Question in the face. The agrarian aspect of the dual problem had to be confronted. Mr. Gladstone

¹ Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. i. pp. 575, 576.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

expounded to his colleagues what was, according to the ideas of the time, his vast and perilous project to buy out the Irish landlords at twenty years' purchase of their existing rents and at a total cost of about £120,000,000. "This large sum, due entirely to an unexampled use of British credit, should be considered as given to Ireland in connection with a great transition."¹ Spencer and Morley were for this method of settling the terrible social question in Ireland, so that a Nationalist Parliament in Dublin might be built on firm ground. Most of the Cabinet were dismayed by the financial hazard. It looked like a leap in the dark. While the Prime Minister explained, the four walls of the Cabinet room framed a meeting perhaps as hushed and conscious as they ever knew. When Gladstone finished, Chamberlain intervened with incisive quietness and decisive meaning.

I contended that it was impossible to judge this scheme fairly without knowing what were to be the provisions of the Home Rule Bill which was to accompany it. Upon the constitution of the new local authority would largely depend the security; and it was evident that if British money was to be advanced, it was important to know whether the advance was to be made to a part of the United Kingdom under full control by Parliament or to what might turn out to be a practically independent nation.²

This point could not be evaded.

After considerable discussion and some hesitation on Mr. Gladstone's part he stated broadly the lines of his Home Rule policy and his intention to propose a separate Parliament for Ireland with full powers to deal with all Irish affairs. I argued strongly against this proposal and also criticised severely the details of the proposed land settlement, and, as I could get no assurances of alteration in any important particular, I stated that it would be impossible for me to continue any longer a member of the Government.³

The Radical challenger was sure at last of his ground. He had bided his hour to bring Gladstone to particulars. Next day (Sunday, March 14) he informed Dilke of his resolve. "As the result of yesterday's Council, I think Trevelyan and I will be out on Tuesday." His actual exit and liberation from this Gov-

¹ Gladstone's memorandum for the Cabinet, dated March 11, 1886.

² Chamberlain's "Memorandum".
³ *Ibid.*

ernment was in fact deferred for a fortnight at the Prime Minister's earnest request, but for reconciliation between them there was no longer the ghost of a chance. Keeping subsequent public effect in view, Chamberlain's initial letter of resignation was framed with acute care. It counts yet amongst formidable State papers. The summarising passages are these:

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

March 15, 1886.—I have carefully considered the results of the discussion on Saturday and I have come with the deepest reluctance to the conclusion that I shall not be justified in attending the meeting of the Cabinet on Tuesday, and that I must ask you to lay my resignation before her Majesty. . . . Without entering on unnecessary details I may say that you proposed a scheme of Irish Land Purchase which involved an enormous and unprecedented use of British credit . . . and that you are convinced of the necessity for conceding a separate Legislative Assembly for Ireland. . . . I conclude, therefore, that the policy which you propose to recommend to Parliament and to the country practically amounts to a proposal that Great Britain should burthen herself with an enormous addition to the National Debt, and probably also with an immediate increase of taxation, not in order to secure the closer and more effective union of the three Kingdoms, but on the contrary to purchase the Repeal of the Union and the practical separation of Ireland from England and Scotland. My public utterances and my conscientious convictions are absolutely opposed to such a policy, and I feel that the differences now disclosed are so vital that I can no longer entertain the hope of being of service to the Government. I must therefore respectfully request you to take the necessary steps for relieving me of the office which I have the honour to hold.

The Prime Minister protested that he was taken by surprise, and pleaded for respite:

GLADSTONE AND CHAMBERLAIN

March 15, 1886.—*Gladstone.*— . . . Of what I may propose on Irish government you know nothing but shreds and patches: even the paper on land is not definitive. . . . It has been absolutely beyond my power, though I have worked as hard as my age permits, to fashion a plan of Irish government. I need not say that bricks and rafters which are

BOOK
VII.
1886.

prepared for a house are not themselves a house. All I ask of you at the moment is that you will allow me the needed minimum of time. . . .

March 16, 1886.—Chamberlain.— . . . I am still of opinion that it is not desirable that I should continue to assist in a discussion which will be directed to objects that I cannot possibly approve. If, however, it is your express desire that I should postpone my resignation for a short time, I feel bound to yield my own judgment to yours, and, although the situation is painful and embarrassing to me, to endeavour to meet your convenience in the matter.¹

March 16, 1886.—Gladstone.—What you are willing to give on the ground of my convenience I readily accept. . . . Both subjects are so tough and difficult, and my distractions are so many and heavy that I cannot be ready for some little time to present them for practical purposes. . . .

At Gladstone's request Harcourt sought to mediate in the old cordial way. This time it was useless. The Chancellor of the Exchequer asked Chamberlain "whether he had any possible compromise to suggest". His suggestion was forthcoming as always, but it was not a compromise. He answered, "Is it possible to discuss the question on the basis of four bodies resembling the States Governments in the United States?"² It was the proposition of federal reconstruction required to preserve and reinforce for common affairs and for Imperial purposes the cohesion of the United Kingdom. Had power enough been in Chamberlain's own hands at that time he would have done it. In vain was Harcourt's earnest request to Mr. Gladstone "that he would himself discuss the matter with Mr. Chamberlain". It was too late. The federal plan required three things—a wholly different method of deliberation, more time than the Prime Minister's age and situation enabled him to give, and complete independence of Parnell.

¹ Bright wrote: "*March 17.*—Long talk with Chamberlain on his difficulties and resignation. I think his view is in the main correct and that it is not wise in him to support the

intended measures" (Trevelyan's *Life of John Bright*, p. 447).

² Harcourt's "Memorandum", March 20, 1886.

XI

The closest view of Chamberlain's personality at this turning-point of his life is given by the late Lord Balfour, then not risen to political fame. Meeting the Radical at dinner, he sent to his uncle that long and lively account which is printed in full in his autobiography. Some passages must be quoted here:

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

March 22, 1886.—A. J. Balfour to Lord Salisbury.— . . . I dined on Monday night at the Bretts':—a small man's dinner:—present, our host, N. Rothschild, Chamberlain, Albert Grey and myself. Chamberlain talked with his usual "engaging frankness":—and, to do him justice, very pleasantly and without "*pose*". I thought it might amuse you if I were to Boswellise our friend. So, while the conversation was still fresh in my recollection, I dictated some reminiscences of it which I think give you a better idea of the real Chamberlain (at least as I have always found him) than either speeches or newspaper criticisms. . . .

You will note that throughout all that was said it was openly assumed that Chamberlain was going to leave the Govt. . . .

Now for my fragments of Chamberlainiana:—

ROTHSCHILD: A great City man, who has never gone against Gladstone before, came to me this morning to consult me about holding a big Anti-Home Rule meeting in the City. I advised him not to do it at the present time.

A. GREY: I have just come from the House and hear that the meeting is to take place in a fortnight.

CHAMBERLAIN: This is perfect madness. For the City to oppose a measure is as fatal as for the House of Lords to throw it out. It is enough to set up the back of the Caucus from one end of England to the other. Whether we like it or dislike it, the Tories are in a minority in the country, and it is only by the help of the Radicals that anything material can be done. . . .

A. GREY: I think this time we shall defeat the G.O.M.

CHAMBERLAIN: Don't be too sure. I agree with what Harcourt said—"We shall never know how strong he is until he has got rid of every one of his colleagues!" Consider what the situation is. He has a majority at this moment of about 160. Of the seats of the present minority at least 25 were won by the Irish vote. I think it is more, but put it at twenty-

BOOK
VII.
1886.

five. That makes 210 seats to be won at a General Election in order to equalise the parties. Such a thing has never been done.

A. GREY: At this moment if you were to poll the northern counties I believe you would find a majority of Home Rulers.

A. J. B.: If that be so, the prospect, if we are driven to an election, seems dark indeed.

CHAMBERLAIN: Well, part of my democratic creed is that if a scheme is truly absurd (and unless we are all in a dream, this scheme is so), people can be made to understand its absurdity. . . .

A. J. B.: In this new cave there are many mansions; and it will be hard to make them all live in harmony together. But it may be possible, I think, to prevent those who are united on this question though differing on others from cutting each other's throats at the poll.

CHAMBERLAIN: The difficulties will be enormous, since the mere suspicion that a Radical is going to get Tory support would of itself ensure his defeat. . . . Now, Balfour, let us make a joint attack on the Whigs. The Tory policy I understand with regard to Ireland; and the Radical policy I understand. The Tories go in for coercion. I believe that if that could be carried out consistently for 5 years it would succeed. The Radicals go in for very large measures of Reform and Local Government. They are ready to allow the Irish to manage and mismanage their affairs as they please up to a certain point, with a determination of coming down and crushing them if they go beyond that point. Just as the North left the South alone year after year but finally imposed their will by force. But the Whigs are too frightened of the Radicals to support the Tories and too frightened of the Tories to support the Radicals. It is no particular secret now that what destroyed the last Liberal Government was not the Budget but the proposal of a National Council for Ireland. The Whigs in the Cabinet would not accept it, and now we see them in the shape of Spencer and Granville going in for Home Rule! . . .

A. J. B.: You do not approve, I imagine, of the absurd system of double ownership in land which your people introduced into Ireland and are now introducing into Scotland. Of course, I am now speaking without prejudice, and across the dinner table.¹

CHAMBERLAIN: Without prejudice, then, and across the dinner table, holding myself quite free in an official capacity to use opposite language

¹ This passage, in the copy amongst the Chamberlain Papers, is correctly attributed to A. J. B. By an evident

slip it is attributed to Chamberlain in *Chapters of Autobiography*, by Lord Balfour, p. 220.

—I do not approve of it. My view about land has always been to municipalise it—a barbarous word, which however expresses my substitute for absurd schemes of Land Nationalisation. I caused my Municipality to purchase no less than £1,400,000 worth of land, and that is the system which I desire to see extended. . . . I think a democratic government should be the strongest government, from a military and Imperial point of view, in the world, for it has the people behind it. Our misfortune is that we live under a system of government originally contrived to check the action of kings and Ministers and which meddles, therefore, far too much with the Executive of the country. The problem is to give the democracy the whole power, but to induce them to do no more in the way of using it than to decide on the general principles which they wish to see carried out and the men by whom they are to be carried out. My Radicalism, at all events, desires to see established a strong government and an Imperial government.

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

The only two observations which it occurs to me to make on those portions of the foregoing which relate to the present crisis [comments Balfour] are (1) That Chamberlain means if possible not to let Hartington be the man who is to throw out Gladstone's scheme; (2) that we shall find in him, so long as he agrees with us, a very different kind of ally from the lukewarm and slippery Whigs¹ whom it is so difficult to differ *from* and impossible to act *with*. What results will ultimately follow in the impending reconstruction of parties, I cannot conjecture. "In politics", said Chamberlain on Monday (in words with which in Randolph's mouth I am familiar) "there is no use looking beyond the next fortnight!"

There was no need to wait a fortnight for the decisive event. It happened at once.

XII

Chamberlain's resignation had been suspended, or rather deferred, for eleven days. They had brought no change. The last Liberal Cabinet he was to attend met on March 26. Gladstone began by stating that he was now ready to explain himself on Home Rule. He thought that the most convenient way of clearing up or defining differences would be by means of a resolution

¹ "Whig" in the *Chapters of Autobiography*, p. 221, but plural as in the Chamberlain Papers seems evidently correct.

proposing to establish a Legislature in Dublin with power over strictly Irish affairs.¹

The Radical attacked direct. The proposition was too vague. It offered no foundation for serious discussion.

In order to define more clearly points of difference I asked Mr. Gladstone four questions:

1. Whether the Irish representation was to cease at Westminster?
2. Whether the power of taxation, including customs and excise, was to be given to the Irish Parliament?
3. Whether the appointment of the judges and the magistracy was to vest in the Irish authority?
4. Whether the Irish Parliament was to have authority in every matter not specially excluded by the Act constituting it, or whether it was only to have authority in matters specially delegated to it by Statute?²

These were indeed acid tests of the distinction between Home Rule consistent with federal union and Home Rule severing or weakening the visible links. It was a great and a plain issue. Ulster, for instance, despite its utmost desire and determination to the contrary, would cease under Gladstone's scheme to be represented in the Imperial Parliament.

On all the four points the Prime Minister answered in the affirmative to Chamberlain's questions, and so in the negative to his ideas. Morley is not to the purpose when he suggests that afterwards these differences proved capable of accommodation.³ None was offered at the crucial moment in Downing Street. We are concerned with what happened at the time. What happened was that Mr. Gladstone—far more obstinate then than he was to find tenable—made no offer, nor opened any prospect, of accommodation.

Chamberlain said, "Then, I resign".

He left the room accompanied by Trevelyan, who had been Secretary for Scotland. Morley, an eye-witness, confesses that the Prime Minister made no effort to detain them.⁴ Miscalculating the future, Gladstone must have been relieved as by a

¹ "I think", says Chamberlain, Parliament" ("Memorandum").
 "that the Resolution was coupled with some conditions as to the protection of the minority and the supremacy of

² Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

³ Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 302.

⁴ *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 303.

delivery from great embarrassment. The feeling of his circle towards Chamberlain personally was one of dislike, and he must have shared it. He had long been prepared in his mind to proceed without Chamberlain or against him. As to the Radical we must not deceive ourselves. He often said that when he entered the Cabinet that day he meant to be conciliatory. In manner no doubt he was. But he was devoid of sentimentalism, and his mind was made up. Nothing but some transforming concession there and then could have held him.

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

Closely anticipating the scope of Mr. Gladstone's plan, as presently unfolded to Parliament, the Radical Unionist and Federalist was determined to oppugn it. He exercised the right conceded to him when he joined the Government—"unlimited liberty of judgment and rejection". His terms forbade conciliation. For they implied three things—the abandonment of the Prime Minister's plan and the substitution by degrees of his own; the break with the Irish party; and Gladstone's retirement. Had Chamberlain's four initial questions been answered in his favour, a score of consequential questions would have arisen. These two men being what they were, the chance of compromise had been lost some months before, when the old leader resolved precipitately but with elemental force to act upon his own will and imagination in a supreme attempt to "crown his career by settling the Irish question". Inevitable was the separation when it came. It was not preventible by any possible composition on details.

Trevelyan put it best just after they both went out:

This is not a question of personalities, but of mighty measures. Chamberlain and all of us, we are just the same; he is the same man with the same qualities and defects; each and all are acting in accordance with their dispositions and characters.¹

Not unworthy of that fine view—allowing for the extreme tension of men's minds in a crisis of this magnitude—are the messages of farewell:

March 26.—Harcourt to Chamberlain.— . . . I feel myself separated from nearly all the men with whom I have the most personal sympathy. These are the things which make political life intolerable. . . . I feel as

¹ Lady Stanley's Diary, March 30, 1886.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

if I am on board a great ship with a precious cargo of life and treasure driving through dark night and a thick fog not knowing what the next day may bring forth. . . . Whatever may be the changes and chances of these bad times, I hope we shall remain friends. For apart from politics there are few men whose friendship I value more than yours.

March 27.—Chamberlain to Harcourt.— . . . It seems as though we had all been for years rolling the stone up-hill and now it threatens to come down on our heads and smash us. It is most painful to me to be separated from you and other friends. . . . If Mr. Gladstone succeeds in his present purpose, it will be the most extraordinary feat ever performed. I do not believe that he has one single convinced supporter for his policy as a whole, and if it had been suggested by anyone else, it would have been scouted by the unanimous voice of the Liberal Party.

March 27.—Gladstone to Chamberlain.—Your resignation has been accepted by the Queen and I lose no time in apprising you that the fact of its having been tendered and accepted may now be freely mentioned. In regard to this transaction, I have yielded to the inevitable, with profound regret, and a sense of public mischief which I trust we shall all do what in us lies to mitigate. Your great powers could ill be dispensed with even in easy times. I shall rejoice, during what remains to me of life, to see them turned to the honour and advantage of the country.

XIII

There is an epilogue. Chamberlain was in the battle, not above it, and his judgment of his opponents is no more impartial than theirs of him. He always held that but for his personal isolation in Gladstone's third Cabinet—with Dilke out of it, Morley hostile, Harcourt unstable—the Prime Minister's autocracy might have been checked and the disruption of Liberalism avoided. Long after, between two of the actors in the scene at Downing Street on March 26, 1886, letters passed. As a psychological record they are more living than any of the immediate accounts:

Chamberlain.— . . . You, my dear Morley, have twice had it in your own power to heal the breach in the Liberal Party—once when I left the Government, and when an earnest representation from any of my colleagues would have secured further consideration of Mr. Gladstone's

impossible policy and might have ended in the framing of a scheme which we could all have accepted—and again at the Round Table Conference.¹

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49

Morley.— . . . I have only one complaint ever to make in regard to those disastrous days of 1886. It is this. You told me that Sunday afternoon in Mrs. Jeune's² dining-room, that I was bound to accept the proposal to be Irish Secretary. On the Monday I had a long conversation with you at your house, and we parted as I thought in perfectly good understanding and with every prospect of co-operation. Then you practically dropped me.

I well remember how at my first Cabinet (rather an incident in a man's life) you barely said good morning—to my extreme dismay and chagrin. In view of this line it was impossible for me with any hope to play the part—which I might have played with real utility—of intermediary between Mr. G. and you. I approached you again at the Cabinet dinner, at Spencer House—and was again definitely repulsed. If you had allowed me to keep on good terms with you then all might have gone different in the Cabinet.³

Chamberlain.—I am entirely ignorant and innocent of any intentional coolness or slight on the two occasions you mention. I have been told often that I am reserved and not effusive. After many years' friendship you ought to know this—but certainly nothing was further from my thoughts at the time referred to than the idea of "dropping you". The fact is that you are too sensitive and also too reserved. If you had complained to me at the time the misconception would have been removed.⁴

He made a note like a man talking to himself: "I was entirely unconscious of any coolness or unfriendliness at the time. I myself was strained almost beyond bearing by the extraordinary and critical circumstances in which I was then placed."⁵ This remark is very human and convincing. But it is as true for others as for himself. Men in these moments judge each other by the illusory standard of external signs. They do as they do and they look as they look. Their minds are not revealed by their demeanour. Preoccupation may be interpreted by a friend as coldness though caused by other motives altogether. This is a

¹ Chamberlain to Morley, April 29, 1888.
1888.

² Afterwards Lady St. Helier.

⁴ Chamberlain to Morley, May 1, 1888.

³ Morley to Chamberlain, May 1,

⁵ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
VII.
1886.

daily tragedy of misunderstandings and misjudgments in public and private life. All but the most considerate are exposed to it.

Shortly after these explanations they met at Malwood, and we have a word jotted down on May 22, 1888:

Morley told me that Harcourt had said to him: "I wonder whether I should not have done better, after all, to have resigned with Chamberlain". If he had done so Mr. Gladstone could not have gone on with his Home Rule Bill and the whole situation would have been different. Morley says that neither he nor Harcourt understood why Mr. Gladstone let me go without the offer of conciliation: he felt sure of winning and carrying everything with a rush. As the result of the division on the Home Rule Bill, Mr. Gladstone was depressed: "I have been egregiously misled"—referring to the assurances given to him, that he would win, or in any case would be beaten by only five or six votes.¹

Lord Rosebery is another witness. When Prime Minister he conversed with the Member for West Birmingham at a dinner given by the Prince of Wales:

He (Lord Rosebery) referred to the Cabinet of 1886 and to my resignation. He said, "I have always thought that you ought not to have been allowed to go. We had been told beforehand that you were irreconcilable, but I was struck with your evident anxiety not to break up the party, and I believe that our differences might have been arranged." He then called Morley and repeated what he had been saying and asked Morley if he did not agree. Morley said "Yes, that was my impression too; but the 'old man' (Mr. G.) had made up his mind that Chamberlain was determined to resign and would make no concessions". As he (J. M.) and Harcourt walked away he had said to Harcourt, "This is a bad business and badly managed".²

Childers, the Home Secretary, was of the same mind.

That so many statesmen silenced their misgivings at the Cabinet table shows Mr. Gladstone's towering supremacy in the spring and early summer of 1886.

XIV

There was another fixed thought in Chamberlain's mind. He believed that the adoption of Home Rule was consciously or

¹ Chamberlain's Occasional Diary.

² *Ibid.* under date June 30, 1894.

subconsciously connected in Gladstone's mind with the desire to make a great diversion in general politics—to sweep aside the new Radical and Nonconformist claims, and especially Dis-establishment. It must always be remembered that up to this time Chamberlain was a political idol of the Free Churches.

CHAP.
XXX.
Æt. 49.

He was the strongest of party men. It would not be too much to say that so far he had been a prince of partisans. To abolish privilege and better the masses had been up to now his political religion. To him as to so many ardent men of that day "Liberalism" was an insufficient word. They thought the word of the future, implying root-and-branch reform, was "Radicalism". He worshipped it as a cause; every fibre of his life was bound to it. He was not only opposed to "Toryism", but abhorred it. He thought it a selfish creed and a lazy superstition. He regarded the historic Whigs as the worst of all the sections. They did Tory work in Liberal uniform.

In his conviction Gladstone's course would result in ruin anyhow. The sooner that gigantic aberration was frustrated, the sooner Liberal cohesion and predominance would be restored. Gladstone was in his seventy-seventh year. His retirement in the next few months might follow his overthrow, or within some few years would occur in the order of nature. The next elections might put an end for good to Parnell's temporary control of the parliamentary situation. When the present malign combination of circumstances was dissolved, Liberalism would be reunited, Radicalism resume its march. Of permanent secession from Liberalism or renouncement of Radicalism, Chamberlain when resigning had no faintest notion. After the coming smash he would pick up the fragments. Meanwhile, as never in all his life, he was isolated and his political existence menaced. Just before resigning he had communicated to Hartington his two counter-schemes for Irish land and Irish government, but in that quarter met no sympathy with either. When Chamberlain went out of the Cabinet he knew that the fight before him would be of its kind as solitary and desperate as ever lay before man. In the valley of peril none could save him but himself.

CHAPTER XXXI

“HIS LIFE IN HIS HANDS”—CHAMBERLAIN HOLDS BIRMINGHAM

(1886)

THE Home Rule Bill introduced—Radical Entreaties and Elijah's Mantle—Chamberlain's thwarted Explanation, a Painful Scene—“I am not Irreconcilable”—A Dark Hour, “My Career is at an End”—Birmingham in Danger—The Struggle with Schnadhorst—The Appeal to the Two Thousand—Fate in the Balance—The Meeting, the Speech and the Triumph—The National Caucus rejects its Maker—Great Events and Small Imputations—Schnadhorst's Defence—Chamberlain holds the Balance, not Parnell.

I

BOOK
VII.
1886.

PUBLIC opinion was at the tension of expectancy before his secession from the Cabinet was announced. When it was known to be imminent, the newspapers, not yet comprehending his difficulties nor anticipating his method, recognised that his personality was about to appear in a new aspect and that the result might be far-reaching. *The Times* commented: “If he is now firm in standing by his convictions and bold in attacking measures he regards as dangerous to the State, he will vindicate the faith of those who have discerned in his Radicalism a strong leaven of imperial instincts and democratic spirit”. The *Daily Telegraph* pronounced: “The action of Mr. Chamberlain in quitting the Cabinet or retaining his place will be decisive of English politics for many years to come”. On the other hand, the Liberal organ, the *Daily News*, declared one certainty—“that either with or without the assistance of Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Trevelyan, Mr. Gladstone will go forward with his plan for the final settlement of the Irish question”.

In private, reconcilers of different shades of opinion, moderate Liberals and Radicals alike, entreated Chamberlain to work for compromise and save the party. Labouchere strove again with the cynicism of *finesse*: CHAP.
XXXI.
Æt. 49.

March 31.—There would be much joy in the Radical heaven if things could be hit off with you, and they would all be ready to put Elijah’s mantle on you, if they could come to some agreement about this damned Irish question. . . . The Whigs would be cleared out. . . . With you to the front we should win at an election, or if not at once, later on. . . . For my part I would coerce the Irish, grant them Home Rule, or do anything with them, to make the Radical programme possible. . . .¹

On the other hand, Whigs and Tories pressed him to range himself with them. This meant blank antagonism to all large projects of Irish self-government whether subordinate or in-ordinate. For one thing the principle implied was impossible for the advocate first of a National Council for Ireland and then of Home-Rule-All-Round respecting the domestic concerns of the four nationalities, with unchanged unity for common affairs. For another thing, to league himself with negation and coercion would have been a suicidal crudity—fatal to his distinctive influence in Birmingham and elsewhere. Isolation, however hazardous, was better than the surrender of conspicuous identity, however hard to maintain.

He evades Hartington’s invitation to confer before the great debate impending in the House of Commons. “I am willing to go further than you are . . . there must be some kind of legislative body or bodies in Ireland.”²

In his memorandum of events at this time he is the least introspective of men and rarely assists his biographer to throw light upon his psychology or reflections. An exceptional passage shows in what complications he felt himself involved and why he had to be as supple and circumspect in his tactics as daring and remorseless in his main design.

My position was very difficult and anxious. I foresaw that, if I were compelled to vote against Mr. Gladstone, I should be singled out as the cause of his defeat, and should be the mark of the most bitter animosity

¹ Thorold’s *Labouchere*, p. 289.

² Chamberlain to Hartington, April 3, 1886.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

from that section of the party which supported him. I also saw that in this case the Liberal party would be broken up, and its influence and usefulness destroyed for many years. My own position as a Radical would make complete union with the Conservatives very difficult. It was doubtful if the reforms which I had been endeavouring to bring to the front would commend themselves to them, and I should then find myself in alliance with a party from whom I could expect no sympathy for what had hitherto been the main objects of my public life. Of course, I should sacrifice all hope of ever again having any office, whereas as Mr. Gladstone's colleague I had the best chance of succeeding him in the leadership of the Liberal party.

I had therefore every possible inducement to come to terms if possible. On the other hand, I was so strongly impressed with the dangerous character of the Home Rule Bill, that I was determined to give up everything rather than allow this measure to be proceeded with in its original form.¹

II

Might not compromise be reached in the few days now to elapse before the introduction of the "mighty measure" and before Chamberlain's statement to the House of Commons of the reasons for his resignation? For a moment the question did not look hopeless. One of his four points refused when he left the Cabinet was soon secured. Childers, the Home Secretary, felt that he too had not been consulted. He insisted that Customs, Excise and currency must not be handed over to an Irish legislature. The Prime Minister, at first unyielding, gave way rather than face another resignation.² Were one further concession made and the Irish representation retained at Westminster, the situation would be fundamentally changed. Consequential amendments covering the rest of Chamberlain's objects might be secured in Committee. On the very eve of the introduction of the Bill, Labouchere again implores the Radical seceder to return on terms as "the Elisha of the aged Elijah":

April 7.— . . . I believe that the Old Parliamentary Hand means to throw out that on details discussion can take place in Committee. The line I hear on excise and customs is: do you want the Irish members? If not you must give them excise and customs. If you do, this is not necessary.

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum". *Correspondence of Hugh C. E. Childers*,

² Spencer Childers, *The Life and* vol. ii, pp. 248, 249,

But more responsible communications received at the same moment dashed all hope that vital concession would be made in time.

CHAP.
XXXI.
Æt. 49.

CHAMBERLAIN AND MORLEY

Private. April 7, 1886.—Morley.—You will not have forgotten our talk at the Speaker's. I mentioned it to Mr. Gladstone to-day previously to communication with you. He allows me to say this much, that of the four points or propositions on which you parted company from *us*, there is *one* on which we have been able to move in your direction, and no more than one. Practically and substantially, therefore, the main objections which you took are still good against our scheme—as good now as they were then. I hope you enjoyed your holidays, and I shall bear no grudge if you are the means of giving a holiday to Yours ever,

JOHN MORLEY.

April 8, 1886.—Chamberlain.—Many thanks. I have no pleasure in holydays just now. I deeply regret the state of affairs, and dread a victory almost as much as a defeat.

Few things are more significant in this book than these two short letters between parted friends who henceforth “stood aloof, the scars remaining”.

The Member for West Birmingham had now to face the most critical or fateful occasion he had ever known in Parliament. Nothing is harder for the most adept combatant than to tread like Agag, yet use with effect both shield and sword. After resigning he had applied in the proper way through the Prime Minister for the Queen's permission to state his reasons to the House. General permission was given. No reservation had Gladstone mentioned to the Queen.¹ But Lord Randolph sent quick warning: “the G.O.M. is capable of trying to trip you up on any formality” (April 5). At this Chamberlain wrote again to the subtle veteran:

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. i. p. 101: “As the Queen's name was mentioned by Mr. Gladstone she wishes Mr. Chamberlain should know *exactly the words used*! Would Mr. Goschen kindly manage this!” Gladstone's letter to the Queen said that Chamberlain and Trevelyan de-

sired permission “to state the points of difference between them and their colleagues on the Irish question, which emerged in the discussions of the Cabinet, and led to their resignation of office”. The Queen's words were that she “granted the permission they asked for”.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

April 6.—I propose, if you have no objection, to read the following documents in connection with my statement:—1st. The statement by you of the nature of the inquiry proposed to be undertaken when you framed the Government, and my letter of the 30th January accepting your offer of a place in it. 2nd. My letter of March 15 and your reply of same date. My letter of March 16 and your reply of same date.¹

Gladstone made strong demur to any words of his own being read, but gave no hint that he intended a manœuvre which would diminish the effect of his late colleague's explanation and might ruin it.

III

The 8th of April arrived—the date awaited by the whole world as well as the nation. The Bill was unfolded. There were crowds without. Within, the expectant scene never was surpassed in any legislative assembly nor equalled for intensity and stateliness together in the Queen's long reign. The spectacle and its implications recalled what we are told of the trial of Charles the First or the impeachment of Warren Hastings rather than an array attending the exposition of a policy. The Houses of Parliament as they now stand had not known the like. The House of Commons was so densely occupied above and below, where serried chairs on the floor supplemented the benches, that no corner could contain another person. Offers of a thousand pounds for a seat were vainly made. One detail illustrates Chamberlain's utmost efforts, to his chagrin, failed to secure a place for the most powerful of his supporters in Birmingham, Dr. Dale. The diplomats, pressed together in the galleries, symbolised the unprecedented interest of foreign nations. Emotions and movements throughout the world were to be influenced from that day to this by what was about to take place.

Mr. Gladstone's rising was greeted with surging enthusiasm by his supporters, especially on the Irish benches, where exultation reigned. His statement and appeal rolled on for three hours and twenty minutes, from just after half-past four to eight o'clock. As an oration it was not his highest, but yet it was a prodigious effort and enthralling in its purport. The sense of its

¹ For the papers (including G.'s minute) mentioned here, see pp. 171-172 and pp. 187-188 of this volume.

momentousness overcame the minds of all men, friends and foes, to a degree that generations born later never can feel. Chamberlain may well have wondered again, as he often did, whether anything could defeat these elemental powers of inspired age. The Radical seceder had hoped up to a few days before to dare following immediately, but this could not be arranged.

CHAP.
XXXI.
Æt. 49.

Instead, Chamberlain closed the great sitting by moving the adjournment. Next day, Friday, April 9, he opened the debate. The House was nearly as crowded and intent as on the preceding day. He had now to attempt a strange thing—to stake his political existence in debate as he had already hazarded it otherwise, and yet to do this in a way that, while telling on both sides of the House, could not give full satisfaction to either. Pale and tense, but self-mastered, he rose from the corner of the second bench below the gangway, where he was a more conspicuous figure than he had been on the Treasury Bench. He meant his own steps to be wary, but little suspected how ingenious was the pitfall prepared to receive him before he had gone far. To read out his letter of resignation on March 15, a terse masterpiece of destructive criticism, but attacking the Land Purchase Scheme not yet laid before Parliament as well as the Home Rule proposals now disclosed—this he intended to be the key of his speech.

He no sooner came to it than, to the unbounded joy of the Irish tiers, the Prime Minister interrupted and forbade. The Queen's permission did not extend to the Land Purchase Bill not yet introduced. Chamberlain protested the difficulty of his position—the two questions were so interlocked and inseparable in his view when he left the Government that without referring to them both he could not do justice to his case. Gladstone interrupted him a second time and a third time and a fourth, and maintained the veto.¹

This “painful altercation”, as Chamberlain called it, disturbed the House for some minutes. Gladstone had drawn “first blood”, and more power to him, said the delighted Irish members. Any other man than Chamberlain might well have been unstrung and thrown into disarray. By a feat of self-possession, he reordered his argument in his mind, resumed it with search-

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. ccciv. (April 9, 1886).

BOOK
VII.
1886.

ing analysis, and with increasing effect worked it out to a conclusion. The essence of his contention was that the efficient unity of the realm demanded federal reconstruction, and that any scheme for Ireland alone of colonial self-government with restrictions would lead to renewed conflicts and ultimate separation. "Sir, it is the difficulty, one of the great difficulties, of this problem, that Ireland is not a homogeneous community—that it comprises two races and two religions." "I should have been guilty of an incredible shame and baseness if I had clung to place and office in support of a policy which in my heart I believe to be injurious to the best interests of Ireland and of Great Britain."¹

This was the forcible criticism of one who yet spoke as a conditional and not irreconcilable opponent. The speech was harried more and more by the Nationalists, who, to their woe in the end, began that night in the House of Commons—abundantly as they already abused him elsewhere—their insensate vituperation and vendetta. Conservatives and Whigs, who cheered some passages, were disconcerted by the suggestions of subordinate Home Rule with federal supremacy. For the same reason another hearer—Bright—was displeased. Many thoughtful Liberals perceived that his flanking attack would be more deadly in the end than frontal assault. Childers, listening on the Treasury Bench, felt that Chamberlain had sealed the fate of the Bill and the party.² Randolph Churchill felt the same with more prescience than the mass of Unionists at the moment, and sent a generous word when the Radical protagonist sat down after a trying ordeal:

By a supreme and unequalled effort you have reasserted your position as leader of the Radical party and on questions of Imperial policy you have gained the confidence of the country. I never heard anything better.³

By these and other tributes Chamberlain was not comforted. The speech, if delivered as conceived, would have carried double power. Thinking that he had been robbed of a triumph by dodge, he was inclined to make it a personal issue of the first

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. ccciv. (April 9, 1886).

² Churchill to Chamberlain, April 1886.

³ *Life of Childers*, vol. ii. p. 252.

class with Mr. Gladstone, and he threatened to bring his wrong at once before the House. The Prime Minister returned soft answers to his wrath and made fullest admission of his good faith. As we have seen, he was presently informed indirectly from the Queen¹ that her permission had been sought and given without hint of the reservation that Gladstone so dexterously employed. Chamberlain was earnestly and wisely advised by his nearest friends, especially in view of the impending and all-important struggle in Birmingham itself, to avoid personal conflict with the Prime Minister at this juncture. When the incident closes, the Radical appears more like the dove with the olive-branch:

CHAP.
XXXI.
ÆT. 49.

CHAMBERLAIN TO GLADSTONE

April 16.— . . . I assure you of my earnest desire to meet you in the same conciliatory spirit. The discussion which has taken place seems to have lessened considerably the differences which unfortunately arose in the Cabinet, and I am induced to hope . . . that the differences may be further reduced before the 2nd Reading is taken. If so it will remove from my mind the heavy burden of pain and anxiety with which I have recently regarded the future of the Liberal party.

IV

His next parliamentary phase nonplussed critics on all sides, and especially caused Conservatives and Whigs to ask what the Member for West Birmingham was driving at after all.

On April 16 the Prime Minister, with the usual ill-success of sequels, expounded the Land Bill—the second part of his dual policy. Following immediately, and at advantage, Chamberlain completed the statement interrupted a week before of his reasons for resigning. He read his letter of March 15—recognised when published as a document of historical significance, whoever liked it or not. The rest of the speech was in two moods. On the destructive side he made sure, but it was somewhat like the lesson in anatomy—the dissection of a corpse. The Land Purchase Bill was no sooner produced than it lay as good as dead. The Irish party loathed it both as an excessive burthen

¹ Goschen to Chamberlain, Tuesday, April 13.

BOOK
VII.

1886.

and as subjecting them by its precautions to rigid financial control.

Chamberlain argued that in the best case the engagement of British credit to buy out Irish landlords would be too heavy and the security too weak; the Irish tenants in the long run might choose to repudiate the annuities in the name of equity. In view of the depression of trade and the extent of unemployment in Great Britain, the money proposed to be risked was more needed at home. Incidentally he suggested that if there were to be a legislature in Dublin, there would have to be another in Belfast. Here again he met fierce Nationalist wrath and recovered Unionist cheers.

But the other mood of this speech expressed an enigmatical moderation. He acknowledged, what Mr. Gladstone confessed with marked courtesy, that the Bill since he left the Cabinet had been altered to meet some of his original criticisms. His concluding sentences seemed to breathe mildness. "I am not an irreconcilable opponent. My right hon. friend has made very considerable modifications in his Bill. All I can say is if that movement continues as I hope it will, I shall be delighted to be relieved from an attitude which I only assumed with the greatest reluctance and which I can only maintain with the deepest pain and regret."¹

He had declined all invitations to stand on the same platform with Conservatives and Whigs at the belligerent Unionist meeting held at Her Majesty's Theatre two days before, when Goschen showed, in the best speech of his life, that in this controversy deep was calling unto deep.

But either in his heart the Radical had no firm hope of accommodation or it disappeared in a few days. For his plan of gradually transforming the Bill into a scheme of limited Home Rule—such as might be extended to each of the four nations, with distinct treatment for Ulster—everything depended, after all, upon whether the Irish representation was to be retained at Westminster, thus ensuring large consequential amendments in Committee. Of concession in this sense, Morley of all men was the very stiffest opponent. There came no sign such as would have made Liberal reunion certain indeed, but equally certain

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. ccciv. (April 16, 1886).

the break with Parnell and the total shipwreck of Gladstone's policy and ascendancy.

CHAP.
XXXI.
ÆT. 49.

The public little knew, nor has it been fully known till now, that these were amongst the dreariest days Chamberlain ever went through. He cried, “Collings, my career is ended”.¹ Looking back years afterwards he often said, “I firmly believed that I would never again be in office”. He saw no way of working with Salisbury or Hartington in the future either on the Irish question or any other.

Liberalism, to which he had given the whole of his being, was rushing to disaster under Mr. Gladstone's daemonic impulsion. The Radical, ingenuous in the audacity of his goodwill, who had risked everything for the Kilmainham treaty and for a National Council in Dublin, was hated by the Irish more than they had hated Forster and Spencer—more than they had hated any Englishman in modern times. Parnell himself, like Davitt, disliked the suicidal abuse which neither could restrain. The Irish members were to make Chamberlain corrosive in his turn and pitiless in retort. He did not begin it.

The loss of old friendships he felt with barbed sharpness. Towards persons he was free from the quality of malice proper. In a note referring to this time Collings writes: “He was true as steel to his friends and tolerant to his enemies. Under a seemingly cold manner he was soft-hearted and affectionate.”² That phrase is too soft; but we have it if we say that he was warm-hearted and susceptible—anything but the metallic machine he was so widely supposed. He was in this like Marlborough, unruffled in the thick of battle but groaning in private, “These villainous pamphlets stab me to the heart”. So Chamberlain in those lacerating days was stabbed to the heart as never before or after in political controversy when Morley presently declaimed: “See what a rent the envious Casca made”.³ But when another Christmas came round he thought of sending Morley the usual barrel of oysters, and he did.

¹ Note by Collings in Chamberlain Papers.

² Chamberlain Papers.

³ Note by Collings in Chamberlain Papers.

V

BOOK
VII.
1886.

In this depression and gloom he was no longer thinking of the House of Commons, but of his city. He had challenged a meeting of the Two Thousand. Doubts of the result were growing. In Birmingham and nowhere else his fate would be decided. In that arena would the thumbs be turned up or down. If he lost Birmingham all was lost. If he held it, *tout peut se rétablir*. Could he hold it against the main body of Liberalism and its deity? The Gladstonian spell was working with potency. The Caucus had been Chamberlain's instrument and now was his menace. Its chief of staff was strenuous against him. In the records of party organisation no man has been nearer than was Chamberlain now to the extremity of Frankenstein. Was he to be doomed by his own monster? Or could he still master what he had made?

For that imminent issue he had prepared with courage and calculation. This is partly why he had constrained himself in his parliamentary speeches on the two Irish Bills to appear as the swordsman with the olive-branch between his teeth. Isolation, desperation—pessimism making him acutely awake in mind yet sub-normal in temperature—all this began to raise Chamberlain, so near his fiftieth year, to his full power of fighting genius, consummate at this time in baffling manœuvre aiming at gradual and full recovery of attacking initiative.

The first sign of possible danger to his position in his city had appeared some time before. Chamberlain's last confidential conversation with the manager of the Caucus, Schnadhorst, was on Sunday evening, February 7. In a long talk the Minister had expressed his feeling that he would soon have to resign. A few days later the able agent, hitherto as docile as Berthier to Napoleon, wrote, in a changed tone, as first and foremost an ardent Gladstonian:

SCHNADHORST TO CHAMBERLAIN

February 13, 1886.— . . . I had always hoped that the Exchequer would have been allotted to you. . . . I am only one of many who is anxious that the leadership of the party should fall to you—this must come if the party remains united . . . party ties are so strong and Mr.

Gladstone's authority so great that you might not have that following in the House or in the country with which you are accredited and at present justly. . . . As to the larger question, that of Ireland, I must tell you that without being prepared to explain or defend any particular plan I believe a bold and thorough policy is the wisest and from every point of view the safest. . . .

CHAP.
XXXI.
Æt. 49.

This was something new as between the constructor and the manager of the Liberal Caucus. From then their lives diverge.

When Chamberlain reached the point of resignation he turned to Dr. Dale and Bunce, the divine and the editor whose influence in different ways on Birmingham opinion was next to his own. He took good care to inform them of his intentions and reasons. A chief confidant was the *Birmingham Daily Post*:

TO. J. T. BUNCE

April 6.—Please deny on authority the ridiculous rumours published as to negotiations between the leaders of the Conservative party and the Ministers who have resigned. As far as I am concerned these reports are absolutely false. . . . All statements as to my intentions and future action are entirely premature. . . .

April 7.—I really get sick sometimes of the malignant misrepresentation of every word and act. . . . I have been very loath to believe it, but I fear Schnadhorst is working against me.

April 11.—When I see you, I hope at Easter, I will tell you all I know about Schnadhorst's proceedings. Meanwhile I fear that it is absolutely certain that he is working against us and as a result we shall have trouble in Birmingham as well as in the Federation. . . . It is desirable to postpone an open breach as long as possible but under the circumstances I can no longer regard Schnadhorst as a safe or a friendly guide. He is now doing his best to prejudice opinion in Birmingham. . . . He has sent a message to me advising against a meeting of the Liberal Association at Easter. Can you manage to get an invitation from the Association to me to address them on the Irish question? . . . Will you also write to Bright? He is really entirely with me on the Irish question but it is difficult for him to speak now and, unless he is told by those whose opinion he values that it is really a duty, I fear he may remain silent. . . . The state of affairs is critical and even dangerous. . . .

BOOK

VII.

1886.

April 13.— . . . I shall of course accept the invitation. . . . It is the duty of every Liberal so to comport himself as not to endanger the permanent union of the Party when this Irish business has been disposed of one way or the other. . . . There are rumours of grave changes in the Bill and the Land Purchase Scheme. I do not believe it will be possible to remove the objections to either.

From the moment when his resignation was resolved his decision was taken to face the Two Thousand; and as soon as might be after the two Irish Bills were disclosed. It was a bold move. Warning Chamberlain that Gladstonian feeling in Birmingham was now very strong, Schnadhorst advised against the meeting and tried to postpone it. At this his hands were forced. Arthur Chamberlain was out for his brother; the Kenricks and the rest of the intermarried clan were active for their kinsman. Bunce played his part. The Management Committee of the Caucus fixed April 21 for the meeting—the earliest night on which the Town Hall could be got. Schnadhorst was checked, but by no means beaten yet. Himself no contemptible tactician, he now worked ingeniously to prevent the Two Thousand from carrying a vote of support or passing any political resolution after Chamberlain's address. He wrote direct:

April 15.—I give it you as my opinion that if it were not for the personal loyalty to yourself an overwhelming majority of Birmingham Liberals would support the Government.

On receiving this Chamberlain made his declaration on the Land Purchase Bill: "I am not an irreconcilable opponent", and then replied to Schnadhorst: "I think my speech last night will show you how very far I am willing to go in support of Mr. Gladstone. The question now is will he meet me half-way." Nothing more likely to persuade Birmingham than its hero's claim to equality, no less and no more. Schnadhorst was in the sure but supple grip of a master whose old supremacy in these matters he had a little forgotten.

VI

Amidst these doubts and dangers, Chamberlain faced on Wednesday evening, April 21, the most critical hour of his

political life in his city. By night his fate would be cast. If the majority of the Two Thousand went against him the ground would be cut from under his feet. No one could foretell what the meeting would do. Its hesitation was likely; its mere abstention from a vote of confidence would be almost fatal. Opinion in the town was both fluid and excited. The issues raised between “our Joe” and the Grand Old Man were too novel to be generally understood. Dr. Dale, disapproving much of Gladstone’s details, was full of admiration for his spirit. Dale might be the arbiter in this ordeal.

Against Chamberlain were three forces—a tremendous party tradition; the fascination of venerable heroism; and Schnadhorst’s knowledge of every vein and nerve of the local organisation.

For Chamberlain were also three things—his own power on the platform; John Bright’s known though as yet silent dissent from Home Rule; above all, the soul of the great city and its love for him. Nearly ten years had passed since its re-maker had ceased to be its Mayor. As it grew larger it reaped more and more the benefits of his work. As he had risen in public life, until he seemed destined for succession to the Premiership, its pride and faith in him had become boundless. On the whole, as Schnadhorst feared, what no other man could attempt he might achieve—and mould this audience to his will.

Never had so many of the Two Thousand crowded a full meeting of the Caucus. They knew that national attention hung on their transactions. Divided in feeling, the throng in the Town Hall was tense and restless.

When Chamberlain rose to address them “by invitation”, an unwonted form, he was met of course by prolonged cheering. A Gladstonian element soon showed its mind, but as he went on it sank into uneasy silence. His style was one of his victories of thorough preparation without a trace of it. After the first quiet, sustained passages touching the chords of memory in Birmingham, the speech became like a stream of bullets—a succession of sentences the shortest possible and the clearest. There was not an irrelevant word, a pretentious word nor an obscure word. It was argument stripped for conflict. Exclamations from the audience broke out every moment. At first hostile interruptions

BOOK

VII.

1886.

mingled. Through the latter half of his speech the cheers volleyed, and there was not a cry of dissent.

The opening was the truth of autobiography and, while shunning pathos, moved all hearers:

Fifteen or sixteen years ago I was drawn into politics by my interest in social questions and by my desire to promote the welfare of the great majority of the population. At that time, I saw the great majority—the masses of industrious, thrifty, hard-working artisans and labourers—condemned by bad laws, and by the neglect of their rulers, to a life of exacting toil, without the advantages and opportunities which education affords, and borne down by conditions which I thought to be unfair and unjust; and I looked to the Liberal party as the means for removing and remedying those grievances, as the great instrument of progress and reform, and from that time to this I have done everything that an individual can do—I have made sacrifices of money and time and labour—I have made sacrifices of my opinions—to maintain the organisation and to preserve the unity of the Liberal party. And even now, in this time of discouragement and anxiety, when personal friendship and political ties are breaking down under the strain of the dissensions which have been raised amongst us, I entreat of you so to continue this discussion that when this time of trial is past we may once more unite without embittered memories, without unkind reflections, to carry forward the great work upon which hitherto we have been absolutely unanimous.

Gentlemen, surely it is the very irony of fate that we should be here to-night to discuss a question which I will venture to say never entered into our thoughts and anticipations a few months ago, when we were engaged in the General Election. It is not very long ago since I was addressing you in this Hall. I was congratulating you . . . upon the hopes which then burned in my breast that shortly we should see some considerable progress made towards the amelioration of the condition of the people, towards the solution of those great social problems which had excited our interest and our sympathy. I do not believe there was a man amongst us at that time who thought that in a few short weeks all these matters would be relegated to the dim and distant future—that we should be absorbed in this vast problem of re-constituting and re-modelling the arrangements between the three Kingdoms. . . .

What has produced this great change in the situation? . . . The whole

change is due to the force of character, to the determination and to the courage, of one illustrious man, and although I regret the object for which these qualities have been displayed, I will say to you that never before has my admiration for them been so sincere and profound. . . .

CHAP
XXXI.
ÆT. 49.

So he vindicated his record. “No; *I have not changed.*” (Loud and prolonged cheering.) Then he attacked the Irish party. Parnellite Home Rule meant “destroying the last link” in the long run. Was separation to be conceded at last to violence and menace? “That is a cowardly and a mean argument and it ought not to be addressed by Englishmen to Englishmen.” The Bill contained no promise of a permanent settlement—no shadow of that possibility. It was an injury to Ireland no less than a peril to the United Kingdom. What Liberal knowing his creed could approve of a proposal “which would tax the Irish people to three-fourths of the whole revenue of the country, and give them absolutely no representation in the Parliament which levies these imposts”? How could such a scheme endure? “Do you believe that any free people worthy of the name would submit for long to such miserable restrictions upon their liberty and their representative authority?” What of the two Orders to sit together in the proposed Irish Assembly—a privileged representation of property sitting side by side with the freely elected representatives of the people? Take a local analogy. Suppose that in the municipal government of Birmingham, aldermen with a property qualification were allowed to hold a veto over their popularly elected colleagues. “I ask you whether you would not resent such an offer as an insult. You would not pick it up from the gutter.”

What of the situation under Home Rule in case of war? “If that happens again, where shall we be?” “England may be struggling for its very existence; it may be in the throes of death; but Ireland will be unconcerned.”

What Liberal could defend the Land Purchase Bill? It implied an ultimate British liability of £150,000,000 for the benefit of the Irish landlords; but a Dublin Parliament elected by the Irish tenants “cannot fail to repudiate the English tribute”.

There was another thing and a grave. “I should like to see the case of Ulster met in some form or other . . . having regard to the great distinctions which I have pointed out, of race and

BOOK
VII.

1886.

religion and politics, I would be glad if there could be conceded to Ulster a separate assembly."

He summed up. The Land Purchase Bill he rejected root and branch. To the Home Rule Bill his opposition was "only conditional". But no effective amendment was possible unless "the representation of Ireland at Westminster were retained on its present footing". Were he fairly met on his fundamental criticisms he would support Mr. Gladstone "with delight" and vote for the second reading of a measure duly amended.

But if not, then my duty is clear and at all hazards I will perform it. I am not going to enter any cave; I am not going to join any coalition of discordant elements and parties; but in the case I have mentioned, I shall give an independent—but I hope, also, a perfectly frank and loyal—opposition to measures which in my heart and conscience I believe in their present form would be disastrous and dangerous to the best interests of the United Kingdom. . . . You would justly despise and condemn me now if, for the sake of private interests and personal ambition, I were false to my convictions and disregarded what I believe to be the vital interests of my country.¹

VII

He sat down to the thunder of cheers. Most doubting minds he had changed. What dissent remained, not inconsiderable, was for the moment paralysed. He seemed unanswerable. Collecting and controlling all his strength, he had done what he meant. But not just yet was the night won.

Schnadhorst has the uneasy duty of proposing the personal vote of "unabated confidence". It is carried with immense acclamation. But what next? It is now ten o'clock at night. The second resolution asks the Two Thousand to pronounce in Chamberlain's sense on Gladstone's policy. Shall the discussion be concluded or adjourned? Much now depends on Dr. Dale; perhaps all depends on him. We have seen that when, according to his habit, his massive, bearded figure appears on Birmingham platforms just after the proceedings have begun, he is welcomed no whit less rapturously than Bright or Chamberlain. In his heart of hearts he agrees with Schnadhorst and

¹ Birmingham Town Hall, April 21, 1886.

would rather adjourn.¹ Had he been warmed by a full conviction in that sense and exerted all the forces of his oratory, he might have carried the meeting.

CHAP.
XXXI.
Æt. 49.

But Chamberlain knows that it is now or never for him. He dares “put it to the touch to win or lose it all”. Let an immediate vote be taken. Adjournment is weak and unworthy. He reminds Birmingham men that it has not been their custom to palter and hesitate. His insistence breaks Schnadhorst’s plan. Dr. Dale moves with all his weight and glow the second resolution committing Birmingham irrevocably to Chamberlain’s position. It protests unchanged confidence in Gladstone, asserts the general principle of Home Rule, but demands that the Irish members shall be retained at Westminster—in the name of the principle that taxation and representation must go together; and above all as the visible safeguard of Imperial supremacy. Enforcing these themes, Dale touched upon the personal question and, with all tenderness towards Gladstone, upheld Chamberlain.

The Liberal Party have a right to demand his [Chamberlain’s] judgment at such a time as this—his frank and honest judgment. He has given it. He would have been a traitor to us, a traitor to his chief, a traitor to his country, if he had not given it frankly.²

The Two Thousand by another overwhelming majority carried the saving resolution. For Chamberlain the worst of all dangers was past. Risking all, he had saved his citadel. That night he had won the fight for Birmingham. There, whatever else might betide, he would never be in equal peril again, though troubles to come in the Midlands would sometimes be tough enough.

VIII

He writes in elation:

April 22.—To Bunce.—Schnadhorst behaved badly last night. It is evident that he has done and was doing everything in his power to postpone a decision. . . .

April 22.—To Harcourt.— . . . I was very much pleased with my 2000

¹ *Life of R. W. Dale, of Birmingham*, by his son, p. 452.

² *Ibid.* p. 455.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

yesterday. They answered splendidly to the call and the little opposition *trouvée* by Mr. Schnadhorst only served to bring out the situation. . . .

April 22.—To Dilke.—I got through my meeting last night splendidly. Schnadhorst has been doing everything to thwart me, but the whole conspiracy broke down completely in the face of the meeting. . . . The feeling against the Land Bill was overwhelming. As regards Home Rule there is no love for the Bill, but only a willingness to accept the principle as a necessity and to hope for a recast of the provisions. There is great sympathy with the Old Man personally and at the same time a soreness that he did not consult his colleagues and party. Hartington's name was hissed. They cannot forgive him for going to the Opera House with Salisbury. . . .

Schnadhorst was to be a trouble in Birmingham for two years more. A few days after his local discomfiture he had his own satisfaction on wider ground. Chamberlain, caricatured for years as the king of the Caucus, was now deposed by its national assembly. On May 5 the general committee of the great machine met in London at the Westminster Palace Hotel. William Harris, the "father" of the system, moved a resolution in the Birmingham sense requesting Mr. Gladstone to maintain the Irish representation at Westminster. An amendment proclaimed unconditional confidence in the Prime Minister and his policy. Discussion failed to bridge the gulf. The amendment was carried by a crushing majority against the Birmingham group.¹

Schnadhorst desired this result and promoted it, but it was not due to his or anyone's engineering. It sprang from the spontaneous movement of Liberal Associations outside the Birmingham area. Chamberlain, various officers, many notable members, resigned from the Federation. The Caucus presently transferred its headquarters from Birmingham to London. It was never again either an independent power on one side or a dusky bogey to the other.

Yet by the "Palace revolution"—as the jesters called it, because it had taken place at the Westminster Palace Hotel—Gladstone at a moment so incalculably critical was encouraged to refuse concessions which had seemed imminent. They would

¹ R. Spence Watson, *The National Liberal Federation, 1877 to 1906* (1907), pp. 55 *seq.*

at least have saved the second reading of his Bill—though not the third.¹

CHAP.
XXXI.
ÆT. 49.

IX

In justice another word must be said before the devoted wire-puller with the Prussian name—hitherto so intimately connected with our subject through all his political struggles—passes out of these pages.

In the frenzied bitterness of that struggle each side thought its opponents both unprincipled and insane. Secret littleness of motive was imputed to most of the characters. Had not Gladstone sold the State for the Irish vote to gratify a senile appetite for power? Was not Morley intoxicated by the vanity of the journalist suddenly elevated above the imperious friend who had fostered his political beginnings? Bright—was he not hostile to Home Rule because the graceless taunts of the Irish members in the former Parliament had inflicted an incurable wound upon his sovereign self-esteem? Chamberlain? Was he not actuated by spite and spleen and every rankling vice of thwarted ambition? Had he been named Chancellor of the Exchequer would he not have repudiated with facility every conviction he had declared in public and private upon Imperial supremacy, the integrity of the United Kingdom, and the consequent limits of Irish Home Rule?

In the great Birmingham schism poor Schnadhorst was similarly accused. Undoubtedly, he had thought himself insufficiently recognised:

He has been disappointed [said Chamberlain] in not getting into Parliament and also in the amount of a testimonial which has been promoted on his behalf. He visits both failures on my head although I am quite innocent.²

¹ It is interesting that at this juncture Mr. Lloyd George was enthusiastically for Chamberlain, Home-Rule-All-Round and Welsh Disestablishment as against Gladstone. When a few weeks later the Radical Union was founded to replace Schnadhorst and the great Caucus, “the declared policy of the movement magnetised Mr. Lloyd George and he resolved to attend its inaugural meeting. On his arrival at Birmingham, however, he

discovered to his chagrin that he had made an error in regard to the date of the meeting, and the pressure of his professional engagements was such that it was quite impossible for him to return to the Midlands on the appointed day” (J. Hugh Edwards, M.P., *Life of Lloyd George*, vol. ii. p. 143).

² Chamberlain to Harcourt, April 26, 1886.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

When the last benefit had been organised for him he was in fact disappointed with the amount of the Radical leader's personal contribution, little knowing that, in response to the direct and indirect calls of public life, Chamberlain already—it was much worse later—was spending more than he could afford.¹ It is certain that these petty jars did not cause the Caucus war. Schnadhorst was anything but a latent Imperialist, and he was a fervent Gladstonian on the Irish question. Liberalism was a holy cause to him, and Toryism the abomination of desolation. Serving his party with an assiduous, all-absorbing mania, he sacrificed to it pleasure, health, and at last reason. An acquaintance remembers him about this time taking at Penmaenmawr one of his peculiar holidays. After breakfast he repaired to the railway station, waited until the train came with the newspapers, purchased an armful, and spent the rest of the day reading them, on the promenade if the day was fine, indoors if not. At the end of his life he suffered from hallucinations and dreamed of redeeming folly by building a cathedral at Maidenhead.

X

These were amongst the unpredictable things of the future. At the moment the severance between the creator of the Liberal Federation and its operator had an influence on affairs. To the Gladstonians the repudiation of Birmingham control by the National Caucus gave exaggerated pleasure. Chamberlain in 1880 was the "Carnot of the Caucus". Now, what lay before him but the assumed fate of Dr. Guillotin—supposed by popular legend then and now to have been executed by his own apparatus, though he died a natural death. Schnadhorst and other zealots with whom he was now associated contributed by perfervid delusions to the downfall of Liberalism.

Chamberlain makes a note on that subject :

The disposition of Mr. Gladstone and his friends was sometimes conciliatory, sometimes the reverse, and it varied in the ratio of their hopes

¹ "Very few knew the extent of Chamberlain's private charities. He was always ready to help a genuine case. On many occasions he has employed me to give such help, requesting his own name to be kept out of it.

On one or two notable occasions I have been able as his agent to help a lame dog over the stile" (note referring to this time by Jesse Collings in the Chamberlain Papers).

and fears for the success of the Bill on the Second Reading. It seems likely that they were misled by their Whips as to the state of things in the House of Commons and by Schnadhorst as to the position in the country. Every time that they obtained a favourable report of probabilities they retreated from their offers and raised their terms, and at the very last moment an arrangement which had been promised was repudiated and the fate of the Bill thereby sealed.¹

CHAP.
XXXI.
Æt. 49.

On the other hand, Chamberlain, after his success at the meeting of the Two Thousand, felt like an unchained man. A fettering anxiety was removed. Personally, he was free as he had not been for years, though it was a freedom as devoid of happiness as fertile in resource. When he is cast off by the old organisation he plans at once another—the Radical Union. In his Midland sphere it will serve well enough for the crisis. Henceforth he relies more upon his power to decide the fate of the Home Rule Bill if his terms are refused than upon his desire for reconciliation.

Harcourt and Labouchere, misled about the prospects in the House and the country, suggest that, whatever else may happen, unless he abates his conditions and softens his tone, his own future will be hopeless. Chamberlain thinks this possible, but he is not moved, and knows that his estimates of the parliamentary and electoral data are better than theirs. The very day after his Birmingham meeting he replies to Harcourt:

I do not expect any compromise or concession. I imagine we shall fight the matter out to the bitter end and break up the Liberal party in the process. We can't help ourselves and we know whose fault it is, if that is any satisfaction.²

Isolated as he was at the beginning of April after leaving the Cabinet and taking his life in his hand, he feels certain that “the Irish Bills in their present form are doomed”.³ Second Reading or no? The real struggle is imminent. It is Chamberlain, after all, who holds the balance, not Parnell.

¹ Chamberlain's “Memorandum”.

³ Chamberlain to Labouchere, April

² Chamberlain to Harcourt, April 30.
22, 1886.

CHAPTER XXXII

“KILLING THE BILL”

(1886)

CHAMBERLAIN and the Fight on Two Fronts—Complications and Manœuvres—“A Deadly Tactician”—To “Kill the Bill”, break Parnell’s Domination and reunite Liberalism—The Key of the Battle—Irish Representation at Westminster and Consequential Amendments—Labouchere as Mercury—The Negotiations for Reunion—Why and How they failed—Irreconcilable Positions of Chamberlain and Parnell—Politics and Friendship: The Bitter Price—Chamberlain, Morley and Dilke.

I

BOOK
VII.
1886.

THE next few weeks of great contest, with throbbing uncertainty up to the last moment, settled the fate of the Liberal party for that generation and made Chamberlain’s secession final—as it proved, though against his hope and will. Than his desire to reunite Liberalism before long nothing was stronger except one resolve. At all costs, and even if it meant his own political annihilation afterwards, he intended to destroy the policy and the autocracy which had jeopardised all he cared for and sought to substitute what he abhorred. Full were these few weeks of tension and suspense, of vicissitudes and surprises, of surpassing debate and ceaseless manœuvre. Chamberlain’s part still stands alone as an example of deadliness in political method.

In exalted and moving pages Lord Morley seems to contrast a Goliath of virtue with a bad David, and depicts Mr. Gladstone at this phase as a heroic and almost perfect man. No similarly idealised appreciation of the Radical combatant can be attempted by veracious biography. In this conflict of life and death which he had to fight out in an intermediate position exposed on both flanks, the truth about him is not devoid of romance

in the D'Artagnanesque sense of any consummate fight won against odds; but it is, and it has to be, a passage of unshrinking realism. Chamberlain had not less courage than the old hero himself; he was facing more personal hazards; not yet quite fifty, he was risking the extinction of his public career just when he had dreamed that it would soon reach a broad summit. For him there was nothing for it but the spirit of real war. He had to cover each flank alternately while he attacked or made a feint on the other. Employing parleys as well as sallies; holding out conditions of peace on his own terms which in essence were the rejection of compromise; working by sap and mine—his purpose as a tactician was relentless from beginning to end.

CHAP.
XXXII.
Æt. 49.

About his objects there is no dubiety. They were fourfold—first to “kill the Bill” as it stood; second, to break Parnell’s domination in the House of Commons; third, to bring about Liberal reconciliation on the basis of more limited proposals for Irish self-government; fourthly, to prevent the creation of an independent Conservative-Whig majority as the result of the struggle. That his preventive aims would turn out to be incompatible with his hopes for Liberal reunion, it was impossible for him in the complicated circumstances to foresee. Had he foreseen all with freedom of choice—the endowment denied to all mortals—his course would not have been changed. He would have chosen his destiny as it fell out.

II

As for method, Chamberlain’s plan of operations was a masterpiece of initial simplicity and further intention. The vital change he required, to begin with, was maintenance of Irish representation on its existing footing instead of its exclusion from Westminster. If this reversal of a main principle of the Bill as it stood were conceded, he would vote for the Second Reading. Otherwise nothing whatever would induce him to vote for it. But were that concession made, what then? Far-reaching alteration of other provisions would have to follow in Committee. His intentions are revealed to Hartington in a letter which lacks nothing of candour or ruthlessness:

TO HARTINGTON

BOOK
VII.
1886.

May 4, 1886.—... In this case the Second Reading will be carried, but I cannot see how the Bill can go further. The retention of Irish members involves the following changes. I do not say that Mr. G. will consent to them, but they will be pressed in Committee.

1. A separate Assembly for Ulster.
2. The complete subordination of the Irish Assemblies to the Imperial Parliament.
3. Irish Assemblies to deal only with subjects expressly referred to them instead of with all subjects not expressly withdrawn from their competence.
4. Financial arrangements to be reversed. Instead of Ireland paying to England for certain Imperial purposes the Imperial Parliament will collect all taxation as now, and pay over to Ireland its share of Education, Local Government, etc. etc.

It is probable that if Bill gets into Committee it will go to pieces on one of these rocks. If I have to vote for 2nd Reading I shall make it clear that the concession does not satisfy me except as a step towards the complete recast of the Bill.

I think it right you should know exactly how matters stand but please keep this information quite private.

On these terms as a whole, but especially as touching Ulster and finance, the Bill would have been doomed. Parnell would have been bound to reject it, and Gladstone's withdrawal must have ensued. But Chamberlain's audacity, startling as it seems when stated with this plainness, was by no means presumptuous in relation to political facts as, after close enquiry, his level judgment knew them to stand. At the beginning of May he felt sure of one thing. For purposes in that Parliament he held the fate of Gladstone's policy in the hollow of his hand. Against him it could not pass. His reckoning worked out to the letter.

The feverish days before the opening of the Second Reading debate were crowded with communications and pourparlers. Without showing his whole hand, Chamberlain first endeavoured to convince the Gladstonians that they must yield his demand for Ireland's continued and full representation in the Imperial Parliament, or else court total disaster. It was a battle of com-

putations regarding the coming action, one way or another, of every single member of the House of Commons:

CHAP.
XXXII.
ÆT. 49.

April 30, 1886.—Chamberlain to Labouchere.—I think that you must now see that the Irish Bills in their present form are doomed. I have a list of 111 Liberals pledged against Second Reading. Of these I know of 59 who have publicly communicated their intentions to their constituents. I believe most of the rest are safe. . . . The Land Bill has no friends at all. It is difficult to say what my own following, as distinguished from Hartington's, is, but I reckon that something like 50 would vote for Second Reading if my amendments were conceded. . . . All our people would be delighted at the postponement of the dissolution and in the interval we might kiss and be friends. I do not suppose the Chief will listen to this, but I have thought it right to make one more effort before the battle is finally engaged.

May 2, 1886.—Chamberlain to Harcourt.—Here is the situation as I read it. I have a list of Liberals who have promised to vote against the Second Reading . . . 119. (This does not include Bright, Villiers and Dilke.) Of these there have publicly committed themselves . . . 70. Of the remainder I think . . . 23 are absolutely safe¹ and the others probably so. . . . If a dissolution takes place the Tories will come in. The Unionist Liberals are almost everywhere sufficient to turn the scale. . . . I suppose there is no possibility that the Bills could be withdrawn and Resolutions taken approving the general principle. Such a course would secure a large majority and heal the breach. . . . I do not propose it, I only mention it because I am almost in despair of any solution.

Ministers were more or less incredulous, though disturbed. Aware that the National Liberal Federation was about to cast out the “only begetter” of the Caucus, they were misled about the prospects:

May 3.—Harcourt to Chamberlain.— . . . Your estimate of numbers against Second Reading seems as far as I can learn entirely beside the mark. . . . I should be most sincerely glad if I could contribute in any way to heal the split, which I deeply deplore both for political and personal reasons. But I confess you seem to me hardly to indicate a basis on which to work. Mr. G. cannot surrender to what Morley calls your “five-bar-

¹ This is very notable at the date. ber of Liberals who voted against the
In the sequel 93 exactly was the num- Bill.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

relled ultimatum", and if he did he would lose far more support than he gained. I do not believe that the number of malcontents who would agree to vote for the Bill if your demands were complied with would amount to 10. The great ruck of the secessionists are against Home Rule "lock, stock and barrel" and will have it on no terms. Quite as many people support the Bill because it gets rid of the Irish M.P.'s as those who oppose it on that ground. The Parnellites (who regard you as their deadliest foe) would be alienated by the acceptance of your conditions. . . . I dislike the whole situation more than I can say, but I think I look at it with tolerably impartial eyes and as somewhat of an "outsider", and as far as I can judge Mr. G. is absolutely master of the position. . . .

May 5.—Chamberlain to Harcourt.—If your information is correct it would be madness for the Government to do anything to meet my views. I would not if I were in your place. Personally, I may frankly say that I do not want a compromise. I would prefer to fight the matter out and abide the result; but I am compelled to make advances to satisfy the anxiety of my friends to keep the party together if possible. . . . I have asked for one point only as a condition of voting for 2nd Reading, viz.: the pledge that the Irish representation shall be maintained at Westminster practically on its present footing. If it is refused I think we shall beat you. If, however, you win the game either now or after a dissolution, I shall try and take my defeat philosophically and shall probably give up politics.

The Radical seceder, looking to Right as to Left, strongly advised Hartington that the best way to secure the largest Whig and Conservative vote against the Second Reading would not be to move a reasoned Amendment which might increase the number of waverers. "By all means stick to the plain negative."¹ The larger the unconditional vote against the Bill the more power for Chamberlain and his group, as balance-holders, to mend it or end it. He was turning against Home Rule the other edge of Parnell's own weapon.

III

By now, however, a new development was in progress. Nothing less seemed to be promised but that the Government's

¹ Chamberlain to Hartington, May 4, 1886.

capitulation to his main demand would constrain him to vote for the Second Reading in accordance with his tactical judgment against his heart. Labouchere undertook the part of a strenuous Mercury, and presently believed himself to be the happy messenger of peace. Gladstone on May Day had launched a stirring but prudent letter to his constituents in Midlothian. He declared indeed that class and privilege were his principal opponents; but intimated that his Land Bill was defunct owing to the failure of the Irish landlords to embrace it; and he went on to suggest that the maintenance or surcease of Irish representation at Westminster was amongst the details inviting accommodation. Chamberlain's formidable estimate of the number of Liberal dissentients was sent direct to Hawarden by the member for *Truth*, who then from day to day sends to Highbury words of joy:

CHAP.
XXXII.
ÆT. 49.

LABOUCHERE TO CHAMBERLAIN

May 3.—Mr. Gladstone has your ultimatumest of ultimatum. My impression is that he will assent. . . . The decision will depend very much on the figures. Of course they don't take yours *au pied de la lettre*, but they evidently are thoroughly uncomfortable about them . . . !

May 3.—I am pretty sure now that your terms will be accepted.

May 3.— . . . Perhaps it might be well if you would write me a line . . . urging a speedy settlement—for Mr. Gladstone is apt to wait for something to turn up to his advantage. . . .

May 6.— . . . It will be a substantial concession. . . . I really don't believe that you will get more. It will fully recognise the paramount character of the Imperial Parliament, enable the Irish to vote on taxation, Imperial matters etc. and I doubt whether the feeling is in favour of their voting on English issues. Anyhow you get your principle recognised. . . . Don't say anything about this yet for it is not definite and won't be until to-morrow's Cabinet.

May 7.— . . . Of this I am certain: it may be that terms will not be agreed to before the discussion on the Second Reading, but, provided that the Bill cannot be carried without you and your friends, the point will be yielded. I regard therefore the matter as done—so don't, pray, act as though it were not. Anyone takes a certain time to make grimaces before he consumes his humble pie. . . .

BOOK
VII.
1886.

May 8.—I have just been reporting progress at Downing Street. Wolverton, who was there, quite agreed that if you want ninety Irish, you ought to have them; and, in fact, the simplest thing is to leave the lot as they are. It was admitted that the Bill will require modifications if the Irish are to sit. . . .¹

About the value of these rapid harbingers Chamberlain's feeling fluctuated; but, within forty-eight hours of the opening of the Second Reading debate, he was convinced by word of mouth as well as by the written assurances of Labouchere—distractedly sincere in this negotiation—that a signal though embarrassing success was within his grasp. "I still incline to think", he says to Dilke, "that it will be better for me if he [Gladstone] holds out" (May 7). As a retort to his deposition by the Caucus he had just written a pungent letter for all the newspapers demanding continued Irish representation in full as the real key, no less than symbol, of Imperial supremacy. Raising the Ulster question, he emphasised his contention that Irish self-government should be shaped so as to fit in with the federal integrity of a reconstructed United Kingdom. Next day, when he has been told that Herschell, the Lord Chancellor, will meet him to discuss a form of agreement, he sends a word of guarded elation to Birmingham:

My letter has created a sensation. Labouchere says Mr. G. is very cross but he means to give way. Full representation in Imperial Parliament on Imperial affairs and full liability for Imperial taxation. I have refused to commit myself, but have suggested they should send Herschell to me. "How will it end?" as the poor Countess said.²

This was on Saturday. The Prime Minister's concession was expected on the Monday, when the Second Reading of the Home Rule Bill was to be moved. In the interval the project of temporary peace collapsed. Repair, though attempted, proved impossible. Why, Chamberlain could not then understand.

¹ The voluminous correspondence in Thorold's *Life of Henry Labouchere*, May 8, 1886. *passim*. ² Chamberlain to Jesse Collings,

IV

Many years afterwards Labouchere disclosed what happened, and his account is at least as good as a play.¹

CHAP.
XXXII.
Æt. 49.

On Friday (May 7) he met Chamberlain, with Gladstone's express approval, to discuss the actual wording of a difficult compromise. Chamberlain after a good deal of talk "dictated to me his terms, which were those to which I knew Mr. Gladstone would consent, it being agreed that if he did not consent the proposal should remain secret". On the Saturday, Labouchere, with this document in his hands, betook himself to Downing Street, where a Cabinet was sitting. "I sent it in to Mr. Gladstone. The reply was that he agreed." Thinking all was settled, the member for *Truth* first telegraphed Chamberlain to say that "All went right at the Cabinet", and then went off to a meeting at Hastings, reading in the train *Thérèse Raquin*. Chamberlain telegraphed to two or three persons that the Government had submitted to his far-reaching stipulation.

One of these messages went to Captain O'Shea, who was in high feather since he had forced the Irish leader to return him for Galway. Parnell was told, and at once communicated the telegram to Downing Street. Indignantly, Mr. Gladstone informed an enquiring journalist that he had yielded nothing. On returning next day (Sunday), "Labby" found at his house a messenger awaiting him with a scathing summons:

Sunday, May 9.—Chamberlain to Labouchere.—What does your letter mean? It seems to me that you are being bamboozled by the old parliamentary hand. Both Mr. Gladstone and Herbert Gladstone told people yesterday that they were not going to give way. I am not going to leave the matter to Committee, and unless the assurances to-morrow are precise and definite, I shall certainly vote against the Second Reading.

For, next day, the Second Reading was to be proposed and the agreed compromise or capitulation announced. Alarmed by this rough challenge, Arnold Morley (the Chief Whip) and Labouchere sent post-haste to Mr. Gladstone at Sheen. The Prime

¹ "The Secret History of the First Home Rule Bill", *Truth*, October 14, 1908.—This account, written more than twenty years afterwards, contains some minor slips but is accurate in essentials. The Chamberlain Papers enable the present biographer to add some particulars.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

Minister answered that substantially the arrangement still held good, but that precision of drafting compelled verbal alterations. Mercury and the Whip were up until one o'clock in the morning. They parted thinking all retrieved. Labouchere wrote twice to Chamberlain that the agreement stood:

Sunday, May 9, 1886.—Labouchere.— . . . I think that the "cave-in" is complete. . . .

May 10.—Labouchere.—Morley [Arnold Morley] did not leave until one o'clock this morning. . . . Morley vowed to me again and again that there was no intention to dodge and that having given up the principle, they asked for nothing better than to make it full. . . . Please think this over, and if you can suggest any definite line of demarcation [regarding questions on which Irish members might still vote at Westminster] and will give it me in the House, I will let Mr. Gladstone have it before he speaks. My last words to Morley were: "Chamberlain is quite fair on his side: he has a natural distrust of the old parliamentary hand and will not be humbugged. He no doubt will not quarrel over mere words but he must have the substance. . . ." ¹

His success apparently clinched, Chamberlain signalled on both sides:

Monday, May 10.—To Hartington.—I learn from my usual authority that an express went to Gladstone last night carrying a letter of mine in which I had expressed strong suspicion that the "old parliamentary hand" was trying to bamboozle me. The reply is of such a character that it is impossible for me to doubt that the surrender will be ample and complete and that I shall have to vote for 2nd Reading. Surely if this should prove to be the case, your line will be to comment on magnitude of change and suddenness of conversion and ask that the new Bill should be produced before any opinion is called for. . . .

May 10.—To Jesse Collings.—All will be decided in a few hours—at least as to present stage. I am assured that there is a complete surrender to me. I expect a terrific row in this case—perhaps Parnell will revolt. Come up here *as soon as possible*. If you were able to be on the spot I think you could render effective service. I am worked to death.

A few hours after came the anti-climax inimitably contrived

¹ Thorold's *Labouchere*, pp. 308-310.

by Mr. Gladstone. He rose to move the Second Reading amidst the tense expectation of most Liberals that he would speak the words to save his party. They were left aghast when, after ample discourse on Grattan's Parliament and in vindication of the spirit and scope of his Bill, he sat down without a syllable of definite concession to the Radical dissentients. The Prime Minister remarked in effect as to Irish representation at Westminster that reasonable views would be met in Committee to any extent satisfactory to the Irish party.¹

CHAP.
XXXII.
Æt. 49.

This was just what the Radical leader of revolt had been combating since the Warrington speech. It was the Parnell veto again. With that perished the last chance of Liberal unity; and perished for a generation, as it proved, the chance of any scheme of Home Rule, whether nationalist or federal.

V

Labouchere saw the fabric of his dreams toppling into a gulf. In vain he protests that it was all a miserable misunderstanding and that the incomprehensible Old Man had meant the opposite of what he seemed to say:

I have told them—which they all know—that the speech has produced the most deplorable effect and that you are quite right in being indignant—and that unless they definitely make up their minds to explain everything the Bill is lost. This they admit.²

In vain he enquires whether Chamberlain will meet Herschell, the Lord Chancellor; and telegraphs, “I think they are quite conscious of their mistake and ready to capitulate along the line. Would it not be possible to see the emissary [Herschell] to-morrow or Thursday?”³

Chamberlain's answer to mystification was blunt, and settled the outcome of all this part of history:

¹ Labouchere's version is: “When the Bill came on for second reading in the House, Mr. Gladstone made a lengthy speech. Both Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Caine were sitting close by me. The former several times said to me, *sotto voce*, that Mr. Gladstone was not making it clear that the pro-

posal to exclude Irish representatives from the Imperial Parliament was given up” (*Truth*, October 14, 1908).

² Labouchere to Chamberlain, May 10, 1886.

³ Labouchere to Chamberlain, May 11, 1886.

40 PRINCE'S GARDENS,
May 11, 1886.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

MY DEAR LABOUCHERE—In the remarkable speech of the Prime Minister last night, nothing impressed me more than the passages in which he spoke of the advantages of public declarations in the House of Commons as contrasted with the inconvenience of underground negotiations carried on elsewhere.

Under all the circumstances, you will, I am sure, approve my decision not to enter on any further private discussions of the proposals of the Government.

If they have any fresh modifications to suggest I hope that they will state them in the House, where they will receive the most favourable consideration from all who, like myself, deeply regret the differences of opinion which have arisen in the Liberal Party. I am engaged all Wednesday, but this is of no consequence as in the present position of matters no good could come of any private interview.¹

This document means much more than it shows. Though, for once, a polite letter-writer—an alarming sign—Chamberlain had no belief that proposals deserving favourable consideration would be forthcoming. He marked the great Bill for a certain and early doom. His position was now closer to Hartington's, but not identical. The Radical personally longed to vote direct against the Second Reading, but in his group of between forty and fifty there were doubts and differences. To keep the group together, he might have to abstain from the division and "kill the Bill" in Committee.

VI

We may well pause here for a moment to ask what was happening to Chamberlain, as a human being. It was an ordeal hateful to him; he who with as much zest as concentration had lived for politics was sick of politics, however clenched to fight this battle out. Worked to death, he was harassed by personal annoyance and mortification. Some of his group, who in the end

¹ Thorold's *Labouchere*, p. 311. A letter undated is evidently Labouchere's reply: "... I will let them have your letter. If the G.O.M. loses

his Bill it will be from not having been able to be clear for five minutes in his seventy-seven years."

followed him through thick and thin, represented that the people were “going mad for Gladstone”, and that any appearance of making common cause with the Whigs would be death. In the hope of modifying his terms, Labouchere told him quite truly that at Liberal meetings silence followed the mention of a name formerly more rapturously cheered than Gladstone’s.

CHAP.
XXXII.
Æt. 49.

These familiar trials of all strong men in politics, when they take a course of temerity, he could bear grimly. There were things more corroding. Even the last lingering ties of his personal friendship with Morley were broken, and at the very same time, to his dismay, his political ties with Dilke were sundered, though affection stood staunch.

The Irish Chief Secretary was peculiarly identified, as it happened, with exclusion of Irish representation—the central objective of the seceder’s attack. Morley, knowing his man, said: “Chamberlain wants us to go down on our knees and this cannot be done for the money”.¹ These sharp but legitimate words were passed on by Labouchere—who also passed on the retort. Stung himself, Chamberlain struck savagely, and for the consequences he had himself to thank:

If Morley meant to be conciliatory, he failed egregiously. . . . The fact is that he is much more concerned for his personal position than for Mr. G.’s. . . . Morley’s view of bringing the Irish back after three years is childish. Does he think that the integrity of the Empire is to be a periodical phenomenon like the appearance of a comet? . . . [Morley] told me some time ago that he did not want to be Admiral of the Fleet but that he would not consent to be a powder-monkey. He has now changed his ship and his Captain, but he has to recognise that his position in the service is much the same as before.²

When this hasty pasquinade was shown to the victim, a proverb for sensitiveness, the Chief Secretary inserted it in his archives of friendship. In the sequel he struck openly to hurt, and struck in his turn with bitterness past excuse.

In consideration for them both we must remember the raging exasperations of the time. When Chamberlain discovered that his unhappy outburst had been made known to the whole

¹ Quoted May 1 by Labouchere to Chamberlain.

² Chamberlain to Labouchere, May 2, 1886.

BOOK
VII.

1886.

Cabinet, he sent his regrets and apologies to Morley. They did not heal the wound.

Dilke's confession of political divergence was the last straw. That he went further than himself on the Irish Question Chamberlain well knew, but had never dreamed somehow that it would come to opposite opinions. Their poignant discussion speaks well for both:

CHAMBERLAIN AND DILKE

April 30, 1886.—Chamberlain.—I am sorry to see the note in the *Daily News* as to your position on Irish question. I hope most earnestly that we are not likely to be separated. . . .

May 1.—Dilke.—As to our being separated I am most anxious as you know that you should not vote against the 2nd Reading. . . . You see, I have said over and over again that, if forced to have a big scheme, I had sooner get rid of the Irish members, and that, if forced to choose between Repeal and Federation, I prefer Repeal to any scheme of Federation I have ever heard of. . . .¹

May 3.—Chamberlain.—Your letter has greatly troubled me. My pleasure in politics has gone. . . . The party is going blindly to its ruin. . . . During all our years of intimacy I have never had a suspicion until the last few weeks that we differed on the Irish question. You voted for Butt, and I assumed that like myself you were in favour of the principle of Federation. . . . The retention of the Irish representation is clearly the *pierre de touche*. If they go, separation must follow—if they remain, Federation is possible whenever local Assemblies are established in England and Scotland.² . . . The present crisis is of course life and death to me. I shall win if I can, and if I can't I will cultivate my garden. . . . Yours very truly.

May 5.—Dilke.—I need not say to you who know what I am what it has been to receive from you a letter which ends with a form of words intended to be cold by the side of that which for so great a number of years you have used to me. Your letter must have been written just at

¹ The whole letter is printed in Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 216.

² In his "Memorandum" Chamberlain explains what he meant by Federation at this date: "I had in my mind what I subsequently explained to the House of Commons, the pro-

visions of the internal constitution of Canada—the relations between the provinces of which I thought might serve as a suggestion of the future relations between England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland".

the moment when I was trying to express something of what I owe to your affection, which it seems that at this very time I had lost. . . . I feel as strongly as any man can as to the *way* in which Mr. Gladstone has done this thing and all my inclination is to follow you—where affection also leads. But if this is to be—what it will be—a fight not as to the way and the man and the past, but as to the future, the 2nd Reading will be a choice between acceptance of a vast change which has in one form or another become inevitable and on the other side Hartington-Goschen opposition, with coercion behind it. . . .

CHAP.
XXXII.
Æt. 49.

May 6.—*Chamberlain*.— . . . The strain of the political situation is very great, and the best and strongest of us may well find it difficult to keep an even mind. . . . We have been so closely connected that I cannot contemplate any severance. . . . You must do what you believe right, even though it sends us for once into opposite lobbies.¹

May 7.—*The same*.—Only one word of thanks and sympathy. I hope it will all come right in the end and, though I am not quite so optimistic as I was, I do believe that *le jour se fera*. I got more names yesterday against the Bill. I have 93 now. Labouchere declares still that Mr. G. means to give way and has now a plan for the retention of Irish members which is to go to Cabinet to-day or to-morrow. I still incline to think that it will be better for me if he holds out.

Gladstone did hold out. According to his nature, Chamberlain held on. The more isolated he stood, and virtually friendless in a political sense, the more obdurate and dangerous he became. When apologising for lacerating Morley by an inexcusable fling, he was sorry for his fault as another might be, but he was not softened like another. He felt it worse that, with private sympathy unbroken, Dilke, after all the years, could be his political inseparable no more. These things went on while nearly every post brought Labouchere's letters about reunion.

Was there ever any chance of real reconciliation in that maze of manœuvres? It seems impossible to think so. Though there were further indirect dealings between Chamberlain and the Government, all attempts at peace-making failed for the same reason. Issues of detail involved fundamental principles and intractable antipathies. Gladstone's purpose was to satisfy Irish Nationalist sentiment, and he would have been frustrated

¹ Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. pp. 218-220.

BOOK and eliminated had he adopted amendments challenging the
VII. Irish leader to reject the Bill.

1886.

Behind all and above all on the Home Rule side was Parnell. The life of the Government was in his hand. He cared nothing for Liberalism; he only disliked it. He loved neither Ministers nor their Bill. Its denial of tariff-freedom and nearly all its financial clauses he detested. More than once he thought of throwing out the Gladstonians. Had they yielded Chamberlain's terms, he would have thrown them out. The Bill was his minimum. He was supremely indifferent to the constitutional aspect of Irish representation in the Imperial Parliament. But he was flint against any restriction or reduction of national powers under the Bill—that is, against the deep-laid Highbury plan of using the retention of the Irish members to change the whole framework of the measure. Throughout this conflict Chamberlain and Parnell recognised each other. They were protagonists rarely matched in what may be called the military ability of politics. In four weeks more the Radical's fighting power and his skill in manœuvre made an end of Parnell's strategical system and overthrew Gladstone's supremacy.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FIGHT TO THE DEATH—THE BILL KILLED—THE GENERAL ELECTION AND GLADSTONE'S DOWNFALL

(MAY—JULY 1886)

RADICAL and Whig Gatherings—Gladstone and the Foreign Office Meeting—Chamberlain's Following wavers—Gladstone and Compromise: "Never! Never!" — Chamberlain's Determination and Misery—A Human Cry—Radicals in Committee Room 15—The True Account of Bright's Historic Letter—The Die is cast—Last Nights of the Great Debate—The Bill destroyed—"The Man who killed Home Rule"—A Penalty of Hatred—The National Radical Union and the General Election—The "Unauthorised Programme" and Gladstone's Downfall—Parnell's System broken—"David and Two Goliaths"—A Wonderful Struggle and the Price.

I

FROM the 10th of May to the decision in June the great debate had its dull lapses, but on the whole it moved upon a higher level of argument and appeal than has been reached since then, though nearly half a century has passed. Most eminent speakers excelled themselves; Hartington attained a massive force and dignity never forgotten by those who heard him. Private members ordinarily not much regarded riveted attention. Chamberlain became a much more potent figure at Westminster than before. The deliberative majesty of the Imperial legislature recalled in some contemporary impressions Jugurtha's awe of the Roman senate. And still it must be confessed that parliamentary discussion at its highest, however inspiring and instructive, was not the primary influence on decisions.

Events were shaped outside the House of Commons. Chamberlain held vehemently that the Government's failure to

CHAP.
XXXIII.
Æt. 49.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

implement Labouchere's promises "almost amounted to a breach of faith".¹ Decided steps were required. He invited a meeting of Radical dissentients. On May 12 they assembled at Chamberlain's house in Prince's Gardens. Though embracing some quavering individuals, the muster was steadier as well as larger than Chamberlain had expected. It placed Gladstone's Bill at his mercy. Over fifty members attended; others sent letters of sympathy. He narrated recent transactions and drew the moral. "The representation of the Irish members was not a technical point, but the symbol and flag of the controversy" as bearing upon "the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament and the effective union of the three Kingdoms". It was resolved that no further private negotiations should be attempted and that the Bill in its present form must be condemned. "The meeting was enthusiastic and unanimous."²

Two days later Hartington held his own meeting. Though Chamberlain was racked with toothache, and implored by some of his nearest followers to have no truck with the Whigs, he attended. At the time this was a strong step. Up to now he had refused to join in any demonstration with Tories and Whigs. He disliked the political tone of their celebrated gathering a month before at the Opera House in the Haymarket. None the less, he conjectured that Hartington in his way would come slowly to Home-Rule-All-Round and a Federal Parliament for the United Kingdom, though not pretending to like any of it. Towards the end of this solid meeting at Devonshire House, Chamberlain rose and showed how near he was now to his life's test. He counselled Whigs and Radicals to sink former differences in resistance to the Gladstone-Parnell policy.

The Prime Minister, resolved to appeal to the country if repulsed in the House of Commons, was lifted up by confidence of victory in the constituencies. Schnadhorst and his agents reported a popular enthusiasm unparalleled. Whitbread, a private member who enjoyed peculiar respect and influence, suggested withdrawing the Bill and substituting a resolution affirming the principle of Home Rule for exclusively Irish affairs. Chamberlain offered to accept this compromise, and at one time

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

² *Ibid.*

it seemed likely to be adopted.¹ "It was, however, rejected by Mr. Gladstone mainly on the ground that Lord Hartington had shown by a speech at Bradford that he would not accept such an arrangement."² Other reconcilers entreated the Prime Minister to drop Clause 24 altogether, leaving Irish representation unaltered for the present. This was Chamberlain's own suggestion. In that case, also, the Bill might be withdrawn after Second Reading and a new Bill produced in the autumn.³

CHAP.
XXXIII.
Æt. 49.

That prospect made the Irish party furious. It seemed to them like throwing Jonah overboard and then scuttling the ship. Cooler heads thought it the best chance of saving the ship. For this solution poor Labouchere pleads with anguish:

Mr. Gladstone . . . is just now in a prophetic state of belief that, if he dissolves, he will carry everything before him. . . . Of course, I don't know what Hartington promises. But does he love you? No. The Whigs are all running about boasting how they have you in their toils. . . . I want you to be our leader. A reconciliation is still possible on the basis of withdrawing after reading it a second time.⁴

The feeling of the Liberal rank and file in favour of some serious effort to reunite the party—or at least to win back Chamberlain and his friends if not Hartington and the Whigs—became too strong to be resisted by the Government.

II

The Prime Minister found it advisable at last to summon a party meeting at the Foreign Office. Preliminaries were not auspicious. Awaited with breathless anxiety on all sides and with agony by the waverers, it was a "party meeting" with a sad difference. The invitation was so worded as to exclude the Whig dissentients like Hartington, Goschen and Henry James.⁵ On this ground, and because the forecasts of the *Daily News*, a good oracle, offered no hope of adequate concession, Cham-

¹ For this episode see G. M. Trevelyan, O.M., *Life of John Bright*, pp. 452-454.

² Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Labouchere to Chamberlain, May 17.

⁵ Those invited were, "all those

members of the Liberal party who are desirous, while retaining full freedom on all the particulars of the Irish Government Bill, to vote in favour of a Legislative Body in Dublin for the management of the affairs specifically and exclusively Irish".

BOOK
VII.
1886.

berlain also refused to attend personally, though many of his followers joined the agitated troop. On May 27 the large crowd thronging the Foreign Office quadrangle had been unusually silent until Gladstone appeared, when the cheering began. The forecasts proved true. At the core the veteran was as unyielding as the younger man.

The Premier stated that the "slightest wavering" upon the principle of Home Rule could not be conceived—"either in the shape of recession from the assertion of it in bulk or in the shape . . . of being parties to emasculating that principle, and converting it into a mockery, a delusion and a snare". He was prepared to reconstruct that "very limited but still important portion of the Bill which relates to the position of the Irish members in regard to the Imperial Parliament". "It is our business to look very closely at the almanack . . . we shall conform to the conditions of time which the revolutions of the heavenly bodies impose upon us; we shall not ask for any further steps to be taken at present after the second reading of the Bill". Then, they might take the future stages of the measure later in the year by prolonging the present session; or withdraw it altogether and reintroduce it with the necessary amendments in a new session. Of these two methods the Government inclined to the latter. "We should then, instead of having a short time before us, have a long time before us."¹

In this utterance with its wonderful touches of Gladstonian phraseology recalling a former age, his mere words might be Delphic, but the will was immovable to maintain his Home Rule policy to the fullest extent. For that purpose the retention of Irish members at Westminster would be subject to closely guarded conditions. None the less, the adroitness of the speech was consummate for the moment's purpose. There was a buzz of reprieve in the Foreign Office. Liberalism was rescued.

That evening, while the orthodox rejoiced, vacillation and dismay spread amongst the Radical seceder's following.

Could Chamberlain save himself? His position was again shaken, though for the last time. He felt that his portion was almost too heavy to be borne, and that his isolation was inhuman. In his heart he had been deeply alienated again from

¹ Reported in *The Times*, May 28, 1886.

Tories and Whigs alike. Lord Salisbury on May 15, in a speech of priceless service to the Home Rulers, had suggested that the Irish were as incapable of self-government as the Hottentots, and prescribed twenty years of resolute government. The Radical leader abhorred this speech—"as bad as anything can be".¹ A few days later, at Bradford, Hartington, instead of holding open the door for the federal system as Chamberlain had expected when he went to Devonshire House, declared against Home Rule in any shape or degree.

CHAP.
XXXIII.
Æt. 49.

III

Between the madness of Gladstonian delusion, as our realist thought it, and the stupidity of reaction, how was it possible to stand or strive? Why should he incur merciless obloquy and hatred for what seemed certain to be a sorry sequel either way? Little given to pathos, he came near it for once in his tough life:

May 17.—To Labouchere.— . . . I cannot struggle against the torrent of lies and slanders directed against my personal action. I can only say that I have been, I believe, more anxious for reconciliation than any one of my followers or present allies. I have not to my knowledge said a single bitter word about Mr. Gladstone, or expressed either in private or in public anything but respect for him and belief in his absolute sincerity. Yet in spite of this, the supporters of the Government are more bitter against me than against anyone else.

For the present I shall maintain the same reserve, and I shall not attempt reprisals, but if the discussion goes on much longer on the same terms, I suppose I shall have to defend myself, and to say what I think of some of those gentlemen who, having swallowed their own principles and professions, are indignant with me because my digestion is less accommodating.

I have an enormous correspondence, some of it hostile but most of it friendly. The breach in the party is widening, and in a short time it will be beyond repair. All I can say is I have done all in my power to heal it—short of giving up my conscientious convictions and assenting to measures which I believe are totally wrong. . . .²

He confesses a sharper pang to that one friend to whom for

¹ Chamberlain to Labouchere. May 17, 1886.

² Thorold's *Labouchere*, pp. 314-315.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

years he had revealed most of his heart. Chamberlain had not begun the bitterness, but, goaded to reprisals, he had used words which Dilke thought touched himself as well as most supporters of the Bill:

May 20.—MY DEAR DILKE, I ought to have said "some" and I am sorry I did not. . . . I am only human and I cannot stand the persistent malignity of the interpretations of all my acts and motives without lashing out occasionally.

You will see that I meet your letter with an apology. I might complain of its tone, but I don't. This strain and tension is bad for all of us. I do not know where it will ultimately lead us, but I fear the mischief already done is irretrievable. I shall fight this matter out to the bitter end, but I am getting more and more doubtful whether, when it is out of the way, I shall continue in politics. I am wounded in the house of my friends and I have lost my interest in the business.

May 21.—*To the same.*—Your note makes everything right between us. Let us agree to consider everything which is said and done for the next few weeks as a dream. I suppose the party must go to smash and the Tories come in. After a few years those of us who remain will be able to pick up the pieces. It is a hard saying, but apparently Mr. Gladstone is bent on crowning his life by the destruction of the most loyal and devoted instrument by which a great Minister was ever served.

IV

The issue stated in that last sentence had come to the edge of decision after the imperfect *agape* at the Foreign Office. Chamberlain's following it was that now seemed most exposed. From many supposed adherents and many friendly Gladstonians, letters and counsels rained on him to this effect: "You have won, the Bill is dead; vote for the Bill". He knew better; and quickly his disarrayed phalanx was re-established—by Gladstone himself.

Within twenty-four hours after the Foreign Office meeting the Prime Minister was challenged by Sir Michael Hicks Beach across the table of the House to explain the real meaning of his proposal to withdraw and alter the Bill without detriment to the policy. Asked whether he intended indeed to remodel the Bil

as a whole, he exclaimed with vehement enthusiasm, "Never! Never!" Reconstruction? He had used the word "with respect to one particular clause of the Bill".¹

CHAP.
XXXIII.
Æt. 49.

It was the old ineradicable difference. Chamberlain intended, by a series of drastic amendments, to limit the policy and reduce the Bill. To Gladstone the bulk of its framework was almost sacred and, as the Ark, untouchable. Finding the word, as usual, Randolph said that the new Bill would be the old Bill. "I do implore you to stick to your guns."² Chamberlain meant to stick to them, and his position was better than ever entrenched.

He had passed through brief but acute peril:

Those members of my group who were afraid of their seats and anxious to find an excuse to vote for the second reading professed to find in Mr. Gladstone's speech [at the Foreign Office] satisfactory assurances, and Caine reported that thirty were shaky or had already gone over. Subsequent events proved that this was an exaggeration.³

Labouchere knows that all is over for Liberal reunion, and his wail is savage:

May 29.— . . . Is it not terrible to have to deal with a lunatic at large, whose intelligence seems to be now limited to a sort of low cunning and who cannot refrain from perpetually bringing an ace down from his sleeve when he has only to play fair to win the trick? . . . The public does not know the object of their adoration as we do. He is still their fetish, and they regard any doubt of his divine character as sacrilege. . . .

Harcourt sent a long, friendly letter mingling expostulation and persuasion:

You are at liberty to contend that you have achieved your object. You objected to the *plan*. The *plan* will come to an end with the Bill. . . . I agree with you that a defection would be disastrous to the Liberal party, but it rests solely with you to avoid it. And do you not see that the greater the disaster, the more will be the blame which (justly or unjustly) will be cast upon you, who could prevent it and would not?⁴

It was too late. The very day after Harcourt's kindly but

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. cccvi. (May 28, 1886).

² Randolph Churchill to Chamberlain, May 29, 1886.

³ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

⁴ Harcourt to Chamberlain, May 30, 1886 (Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. i. p. 588).

BOOK
VII.
1886.

unconvincing appeal was penned, Chamberlain, as we are about to see, cast the die. His choice was made for ever, as it proved.

We know that Gladstone and his Cabinet could not help themselves. They had to choose strictly between breaking up Liberalism or being wrecked by Parnell in a way plunging them into ignominy as well as disaster. Dining at Prince's Gardens years after, Morley described how through him the Irish leader, before the Foreign Office meeting, threatened the Cabinet with destruction. "You see, Parnell had us in a vice."¹ That hard master resolved to throw out the Government were Chamberlain allowed to strangle the Bill.²

V

The *dénouement* of the tragedy for Liberalism and the Irish party was determined on May 31 in a singular manner. John Bright intervened at last with a potency he had not desired but ought to have foreseen. Chamberlain had summoned his own Radical group to a meeting in Committee Room 15 of the House of Commons, the very room where Parnell's party in its turn was one day to perish. The great episode of that day has been the theme of a thousand melodramatic and inaccurate versions. Mr. G. M. Trevelyan's biography of John Bright threw a clearer light. The full account must be given here for the first time. For weeks, feeling that Bright alone could save the party, Chamberlain had pressed him to act:

TO JOHN BRIGHT

May 15.—I do not know that anything can be done to bring about a better feeling, but if it is humanly possible, you, and you alone, can effect it. No one can dare to call you a traitor or to impute to you, as they impute most unjustly to us, personal and interested motives and hostility to our great leader.

A few wise and brave words from you at this crisis might prevent untold calamities. Is it not a duty to say them?

¹ Chamberlain's Occasional Diary, March 15, 1891.—See also Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. pp. 333-334.

² Wm. O'Brien, *Evening Memories*, p. 125. O'Brien, closer to Parnell than any of his colleagues, wrote in *United*

Ireland: "The proposal to withdraw the Bill either before or after the second reading is absolutely out of the question. It would be a defeat more disastrous than could by any possibility be sustained in the lobbies."

I have hesitated to press you, but the situation is so desperate that I feel bound to implore you to intervene in the debate and to say what you feel on the great issue that has arisen. From you an appeal to Mr. Gladstone to withdraw his Bill and reconsider the subject would have more weight than from anyone else. This is the best solution of our difficulties. Time will heal the wounds already made, and reflection may bring us all to something like agreement.

CHAP.
XXXIII.
Æt. 49.

But if Mr. Gladstone should refuse, even then you would have done infinite service by covering with the shield of your great name and unquestioned honour the independent action of those who have, with great grief, been compelled to sever themselves from a policy that they believe in their conscience to be ruinous to the country.

Through the judicious Whitbread, approved by all men, Bright at once advised Mr. Gladstone in the exact sense of this plea—"withdraw the Bill before Second Reading division". But in public he would neither speak nor move.

Averse like Hartington from Home Rule of any kind, Bright was at least as much opposed to Chamberlain's federalism as to the Prime Minister's disintegration. Wishing to spare Mr. Gladstone personally, he dreaded above all things, in the interests of Liberalism, an early dissolution; and now seems to have thought it best to gain time by allowing the measure to bleed slowly to death through months in Committee. Feeling himself solemnly and unalterably bound to give his own vote against an unholy thing, he wished as many other Liberals as possible to abstain, in order that the Second Reading might be weakly carried. This idea was not in itself so confused or ineffectual as many have represented, but it was hopelessly impracticable.

On the very eve of the Radical muster in Committee Room 15, Chamberlain entreated again:

TO JOHN BRIGHT

May 30.—MY DEAR BRIGHT, I can think of nothing else but the situation and the tremendous responsibility of any decision.

The meeting to-morrow will be one of the most important ever held—for on its decision will depend the fate of the Government and of the party.

I do most earnestly beg of you to be present and to give us the benefit of your experience and judgment.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

I know that you have an instinct in these things which is always right. I think it is your duty not to hold aloof but to help us to come to a right conclusion in a matter which affects such vital interests.

Personally, I am still inclined to walk out and let the Second Reading be carried by a small majority. The Bill ought to have been withdrawn unconditionally, but the question now is whether it is necessary to insist on this and to force a dissolution by defeating Mr. Gladstone.

All seems to turn on what will be the course of the Government if they are allowed a Second Reading.

Will they take advantage of this to push on the same or a worse Bill in October—or will they take warning, and seek by consultation with friends to avoid the errors of the past?

*Pray come to the meeting in No. 15 Committee Room at 5 P.M. to-morrow.*¹

Bright would not come. But he was influenced. He sent a momentous answer. In his absence, the Radical dissentients met. They were more than fifty strong. Chamberlain, presiding, explained the alternative before them—to “walk out” or “vote against”. With a dry, precise impartiality quite unlike his usual speaking, he stated the case for each course and the objections. He declined, in advance of the discussion, to indicate his own preference. Some who were present remembered his speech as a model of judicial analysis, leaving the company in a mood of icy doubt. But—he then read, in full, Bright’s letter:

BRIGHT TO CHAMBERLAIN²

One Ash, Rochdale, May 31, 1886.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN—My present intention is to vote against the second reading. Not having spoken in the debate, I am not willing to leave my view of the Bill or Bills in any doubt.

But I am not willing to take the responsibility of advising others as to their course. If they can content themselves with abstaining from the division, I shall be glad—they will render a greater service by preventing the threatened dissolution than by compelling it, if Mr. Gladstone is unwise enough to venture upon it.

¹ On the same date William Kenrick wrote to Chamberlain after seeing Bright: “Won’t promise. Is more inclined to vote against the Bill. . . . He is at present more in harmony with Hartington than with you. He would not give Ireland a Parliament of any

kind, and he entirely disbelieves in the policy of Federation.”

² Amongst the Chamberlain Papers is the original of this letter. Though it appears in Trevelyan’s *John Bright*, it must be given here as vital in Chamberlain’s biography.

You will see from this exactly where I am. A small majority for the Bill may be *almost* as good as its defeat, and may save the country from the heavy sacrifice of a General Election. I wish I could join you, but I cannot now change the path I have taken from the beginning of this unhappy discussion.—Believe me always, sincerely yours,

CHAP.
XXXIII.
ÆT. 49.

JOHN BRIGHT.

If you think it of any use, you may read this note to your friends.

Between the sentences, as Chamberlain read them, you could have heard a pin drop. Profound was the impression. And no less simple. Example was more than precept. What was good enough for Bright was good enough for them. They would follow his own plain course, not his more involved advice to others. Trevelyan, for instance, had earnestly dreaded all parleying and paltering. Just before this, he had written to Chamberlain: "We have got the men together to defeat the scheme and have got them into good heart. If we go to pieces now we shall never unite again."¹

Now, Trevelyan, jumping up, made the speech of the day and the speech of his life. With fire he protested that, if they did not vote against the Bill like Bright, "we should stand before the world as the most dishonest and cowardly party in the House of Commons".² Most of the following speakers were vigorous in the same sense.

On a show of hands, only three members were in favour of supporting the Second Reading. Only thirteen were for abstention. Those for direct rejection of the Bill were thirty-nine. Chamberlain stated his entire personal concurrence with that majority. When the main question was again put, forty-eight hands were held up for the straight vote against the Second Reading. There was an end of Home Rule and of Liberal power for that century.

VI

It was long said that Bright's letter had not been read in its entirety; that it had been partly read by W. S. Caine, a Radical dissentient Whip; and that he had then torn it to bits

¹ Trevelyan to Chamberlain, May 25, 1886.

² Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
VII.
1886.

that its full contents might never be known.¹ This lurid version was grotesquely mythical.

The famous letter was not written to Caine; he never had it; every word of it was read out by Chamberlain; it was not torn to bits; it still exists.

None the less, when Bright, sitting in the Reform Club, heard what had happened, he was filled with distress and consternation. The greatness of the Liberal party had been created in his lifetime; the thought of its utter downfall was like a knell unbearable. Gladly now—as he wrote at length to Chamberlain—would he conform his individual example to his precept for the rest. He would abstain from voting if Chamberlain and his friends would do likewise. Too late was this revulsion:

CHAMBERLAIN AND BRIGHT

June 1.—Bright.—I was surprised when Mr. Caine told me last night of your decision, and that my proposed vote had much influenced it—for my vote was intended to make it more easy for you and your friends to abstain from voting in the coming division. If I had thought I could do harm, I should have said something *more* or *less*.

Even now, if it is not too late, I would join you in abstaining if we could save the House and the country from a dissolution which may for the Liberal party turn out a catastrophe, the magnitude of which cannot be measured.

For myself I have no anxiety, for to leave Parliament would be an immense relief, but I care for the Party and for its objects, and for the country.

To dissolve will be an act of grievous wrong on the part of the Minister—the question does not require it—the country does not demand it, and only the pride of the chief, who is disappointed at his failure, can make it in any way necessary. . . .

June 2.—Chamberlain.—Your letter no doubt braced and encouraged the meeting on Thursday to take a bold course, but their inclination was always that way.

They felt . . . that you were going to have the courage of your convictions and that they ought not to be less brave.

¹ As to this meeting, nothing could be further from accuracy than Caine's recollections years afterwards as they

appear in *W. S. Caine, M.P.: a Biography*, by John Newton, pp. 154-155.

Personally, I was inclined to abstain, but I am convinced, on further reflection, that such a course, though it might have tided over the difficulty for the moment, would hardly have been consistent or honest.

CHAP.
XXXIII.
ÆT. 40.

I do not see that anything can be done, unless you saw your way to urge Mr. G. in the House to withdraw the Bill unconditionally and take a vote of general confidence in the Government in its place.

June 5.—Bright.—I see nothing more to be done. Mr. G. is very obstinate and I suspect cannot now yield. . . . I am not sure that the fear of dissolution will not, after all, carry the Second Reading. I shall regret it, but the discussion between now and October or February will, I hope, more effectually kill the Bill. But I believe no Parliament is needed—and I shall not support one.

June 6.—Chamberlain.—I am afraid that you are right, and that nothing can be done to alter the situation which has been made for us by one great man. . . . The fact is that the meeting admired your example even more than your advice and perhaps were emboldened by the first to disregard the second. . . .

VII

Chamberlain refrained from intervention in the great Second Reading debate until he was sure of the solidity of his group and of its action. The day after the casting of the die in Committee Room 15, he made on the first of June the ablest speech he had yet delivered in the House of Commons.

These pages have anticipated his substance. He would willingly vote for some "Home Rule", but the term might mean anything from Grattan's Parliament to a subordinate Council or Councils for Ireland. All turned upon the more or less. There was no prospect of the reconstruction and limitation of the Bill in his sense:

I have always held the same language on the Irish question that I hold to-day, and it does seem to me a strange thing that some of my honourable friends should be so anxious to convict me of inconsistency and of having changed an opinion which I expressed twelve years ago, when there is hardly one of them to-day who holds the opinions which he entertained less than twelve weeks ago.

Without the continuous attendance of the Irish members the

BOOK
VII.
1886.

Imperial Parliament would become "a periodic and spasmodic body". Ulster's claim to separate treatment would have to be faced. The right way was to apply something like the Constitution of Canada to the United Kingdom and to create between its parts "the relations *inter se* of the provinces of Canada and the Dominion Parliament".

It will appear to the House that my objections to the Bill as it stands are unchanged. I cannot see that the amendments which have been suggested by the Prime Minister would meet those objections in any considerable measure; therefore I feel it my duty to vote against the Second Reading. We are threatened with a dissolution; a dissolution has no terrors for me. Of one thing I am confident, and I know something about the matter—that the Unionist majority in this House will be strengthened. I am very sorry that this House from which so much was expected should have had but a brief and barren existence, but I am glad that this great issue having been raised is to be submitted to the only tribunal whose decision we can all accept and which is competent to pronounce it. We also appeal to Caesar.

Two things, he went on, had become clear—the "passionate devotion" of the British democracy to the Prime Minister, and the surprising universality of sentiment in favour of some form of Irish self-government. But not the form proposed by the Bill. As to the manner of singling him out for slander, "there is not a man here who does not know that every personal and political interest would lead me to cast in my lot with the Prime Minister".¹

This difficult argument, harried throughout by Irish derision, forbade enthusiasm, yet compelled all hearers to listen. "I thought your speech admirable", said John Bright, not always a lenient critic of its author. Another auditor describes his new aspect in the House during this struggle:

Sitting amidst old friends and colleagues from whom he was dissenting, facing the exasperated Irish whose cause he was assailing, constantly embarrassed by interpellations and ejaculations, he evinced complete self-control and unruffled coolness.²

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. ccvii. (June 1, 1886).

Sketches from the House of Commons, p. 142.

² Sir Richard Temple, *Character*

Gladstone is said to have remarked, "He never spoke like this when he was with me". Partly, no doubt, isolation and adversity had raised Chamberlain's powers. He was of that character. Also, the Prime Minister till now had never come near to a true measure of the man he had lost. Again, the natures and faculties and positions of the two were such that the Radical never had any chance to reveal his full capacity in the House of Commons until he became the Olympian's direct opponent.

CHAP.
XXXIII.
ÆT. 49.

Yet Chamberlain in his turn soon felt what it was to have Gladstone against him. On the last night of the debate the magnificent old man recovered the glow and lustre of his oratory and added brilliant humour:

My right honourable friend says that a dissolution has no terrors for him. I do not wonder at it. I do not see how a dissolution can have any terrors for him. He has trimmed his vessel and he has touched his rudder in such a masterly way that, in whichever direction the winds of heaven may blow, they must fill his sails. . . . Under other circumstances, I should, perhaps, have been tempted to ask the secret of my right honourable friend's recipe; as it is, I am afraid I am too old to learn it.¹

More delightful than exact, this banter rather raised public estimate of Chamberlain's abilities than convinced public opinion that he was more inconsistent than his mentor. He had always stood for large Irish self-government not weakening the connection with Westminster. For separation or semi-separation of legislatures he never had stood. As genuinely as any American believed in the cohesion of the United States, he believed in federalising the United Kingdom to meet the new circumstances. His absolute conviction that the treatment of the parts ought to contribute to the strength of the whole was the soul of his action.

It was all settled now. The gods shook it from their laps despite Labouchere's last cries:

The issue of the division on Monday is—we believe—entirely in your hands. . . . It is impossible to shut our eyes to the fact that a General Election, without you on our side, may lead to a Whig-Tory or Tory-Whig Government, which would relegate to the dim and distant future all those measures which you and we so ardently desire may become

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. cccvi. (June 8, 1886).

BOOK
VII.
1886.

law. . . . I fully recognise how conciliatory your attitude has been, and how anxiously you have sought to see your way from disruption during all the discussions I have had with you.

Again on the same day:

You might yield very gracefully to the Radicals. . . . Were you to do so you would become the most popular man in England with all who are honestly your political adherents.

And finally:

My conviction is that the Radicals are damned for years if we are defeated to-morrow.¹

VIII

When the House divided at one o'clock in the morning, June 8, Chamberlain turned towards the lobby whither the "Noes" were thronging. For weeks, as we have seen, he personally had been sure how the vote would go. To the last moment many other experienced observers were uncertain. The cleared House filled again. When the tellers came in the Ministerial Whips stood on the left of the table. The Bill had been beaten by 30—for the Second Reading 313; against 343. Then homage to one man and execration of another broke from the Irish tiers. Rising *en masse*, their wild cheers for Gladstone were followed by a storm of hate against Chamberlain. "Traitor! Judas!" The sound and gestures of that hatred were such as some who heard and witnessed thought appalling. Parnell himself said afterwards in his quiet, vibrating tones, "There goes the man who killed Home Rule".

Of the 93 Liberals in the "No" lobby half were Chamberlain's battalion—or 46 to be exact. In the sight of the rank and file of Unionists he was the hero of the decision; in the sight of others he was the enemy for ever, pursued by a spirit of vengeance to his last hour and after.

Outside the House excited Nationalists in the crowd longed to lynch him. But one fact of that night was to be uppermost for twenty years to come. The "predominant partner" had spoken loud. England sent 285 of her representatives into the lobby against the Bill and only 170 in favour of it.

¹ Three letters, all dated June 5, "to-morrow" may have been written 1886, from Labouchere to Chamberlain on June 6. (Thorold's *Labouchere*, pp. 320-323.)

The thing was done, the Bill destroyed, political history changed. For all action so great in consequence, amidst historic controversy, a full price must be paid. Bright himself had begun the attack from the Liberal side on the "rebel party". "How is it that Chamberlain is the object of so much bitterness?" wrote Dale at the time. The reason, as old opponents of Chamberlain have told the present writer, is that he "spoke wicked", and suggested in every accent, and in every trait as he stood, that he meant death. Lord Randolph's more flagrant rhetoric was amusing by comparison. On the evening of June 8, after the division, the Chief Secretary spoke at the Eighty Club with rare fire and gallantry. Assailing the Radical Unionists more than the Whigs, John Morley likened Gladstone's defeat to the assassination of Caesar:

Look! In this place ran Cassius' dagger through;
See what a rent the envious Casca made;
Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed.

He added, no doubt, "I beg you not to fit these antique names to modern imitators".¹ The incitement was too tempting, and to devoted Gladstonians Chamberlain became "Casca", as to affrighted Conservatives he had so lately been "Jack Cade". Long-beloved friends, when estranged and embittered, are apt to know from their former knowledge of us where to hit. Never in his life was Chamberlain more deeply wounded by a single stroke than by this thrust from the Chief Secretary's hand. Between him and Morley, after a while, there were intermittent amenities, but no thorough reconciliation of hearts for many, many years.

IX

On the morning after the division Ministers met to consider their course. They had to resign or dissolve. To this Cabinet Schnadhorst was invited. Without his former master's judgment to give him general direction, his reports in detail, as so often happens, proved a fallacious guide. He was confident that in the boroughs the transfer of the Irish vote would more than balance Liberal defections. In his opinion the influence over rural labour of the "unauthorised programme" and "three acres and a

¹ *The Times*, June 9, 1886.

BOOK

VII.

1886.

cow" had been over-estimated. He thought the counties safe. Gladstone, needless to say, was bent with indomitable hope on dissolution. For weeks he had been led to dream that he would carry the country.

A joint manifesto was proposed by Chamberlain to Hartington and Bright. Both declined—"chiefly because they did not agree with me in my willingness to accept an extended scheme of local government for Ireland provided that the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament were maintained". "Both thought it better to oppose Mr. Gladstone's scheme and not to suggest any alternative."¹ The Radical Unionist—as he now was for good—was the first amongst the political leaders to issue his own address. Elaborate, and generally thought to be too lengthy—a fault seldom imputed to him—this appeal to his constituents in West Birmingham and to the nation dwelt chiefly upon the danger "to the unity and even to the safety of the United Kingdom"; and upon the crux of Ulster; and upon the expediency of "a complete system of popular local government, alike in its main features for England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales".²

As he had suggested to the House of Commons, he had no fear for his city. There only a single division was in some doubt.

To replace the old Caucus for Midland purposes he improvised a new organisation—the National Radical Union. Its stated object was to maintain the Union while promoting a uniform system of self-government for all parts of the United Kingdom under the assured supremacy of the Imperial Parliament. Bright was asked to join it as Vice-President but declined, protesting that he never had much faith in caucuses and now had less than ever. Yet he surprised all expectations by issuing a short letter, perhaps the pithiest and weightiest of its kind ever written:

. . . What will be the value of a party when its whole power is laid at the disposal of a leader from whose authority no appeal is allowed? At this moment it is notorious that scores of members of the House of Commons have voted with the Government who, in private, have condemned the Irish Bills. Is it wise for a Liberal elector or constituency

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

² June 11, 1886: "To the Electors of the Western Division of Birmingham".

to prefer such a member, abject at the feet of a Minister, to one who takes the course dictated by his conscience and his sense of honour? ¹

CHAP.
XXXIII
ÆT. 49.

This was addressed to Barrow, but it told like cannon-shot in Birmingham.

Not confined to activity on all sides in the Midlands, Chamberlain's campaign was national and ranged wide. He spoke at Barrow for his own lieutenant, Caine; at Cardiff for Brand, one of the stalwarts of the Hartington wing; and in the Rosendale division of Lancashire, where Hartington was hard pressed.

Everywhere he aroused fighting enthusiasm at his meetings. Now his invective was his force. In the storm of the conflict his constructive policy for Ireland and the United Kingdom went to the bottom. Expositions of British federalism reduced to zero the temperature of democratic audiences. Federalism became a shadow in the background scarcely discernible by the popular eye. Addressing Conservatives now as well as Liberal Unionists, he met hate with hate. Denouncing dynamiters, assassins, separatists, agrarian outrage, parliamentary intimidation, he employed a new and sulphurous power of incitement. Chamberlain, now and many a time henceforth, made his audiences bay.

To nobler purposes he confessed himself a Radical Imperialist. Feeling profoundly, he spoke on this theme like no leading statesman then living. His highest effort in this kind was in Birmingham itself, when on the eve of the poll he brought a massed audience to its feet in transport:

These two islands have always played a great part in the history of the world. For again and again—outnumbered, overmatched—confronted with difficulties and dangers—they have held their own against a world in arms. They have stubbornly and proudly resisted all their enemies and scattered them like chaff before the wind. And if, . . . now, you are going to yield to the threat of obstruction and agitation; if you tremble at the thought of responsibility; if you shrink from the duty which is cast upon you; if you are willing to wash your hands of your obligations; if you will desert those who trust to your loyalty and honour; if the British courage and pluck are dead within your hearts; if you

¹ John Bright to W. S. Caine (June 22, 1886), Radical Unionist candidate for Barrow. See John Newton, *W. S. Caine*, p. 167.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

are going to quail before the dagger of the assassin and the threats¹— (“Never” and protracted cheering, the audience rising in a body)— and the threats of conspirators and rebels, then I say indeed the sceptre of dominion will have passed from our grasp, and this great Empire will perish with the loss of the qualities which have hitherto sustained it.²

A new note this. Henceforth his dominant tone, it raised him in the end, though not soon, to long years of national ascendancy.

Gladstone’s tour of the country was of all his progresses and crusades the most picturesque and moving. It possessed the incomparable attractions of valiant age and puissant oratory; fascinated multitudes of the simple; moved them almost to worship. Is this word extravagant? Those who may think so never knew what it was to behold him, and to hear him, and to be young; or what it was even to live in the time when his personal spell was in the air and swayed masses who neither saw him nor heard. In many boroughs the Irish influx swelled the size and heated the fervour of Liberal meetings. In that atmosphere it seemed that political miracles must happen. Ignored was Chamberlain’s shrewd warning about “the men who stay away”.

X

Then came the crash.

The elections began on July 1. In Birmingham no less than five members were returned unopposed—Chamberlain, Bright, George Dixon, Kenrick and Powell Williams. In the two contested elections on July 3, Unionists won both seats.³ It was “We are seven” again—with a little difference. All were Unionists, but Henry Matthews was a Conservative.

The crushing defeat of Gladstonian Liberalism in London was

¹ Well-informed Unionists in London had been warning Chamberlain for some time that there were plots

to assassinate him.

² Birmingham Town Hall, July 2, 1886.

³ East Division:

MATTHEWS, H., Q.C. (Cons.)	.	.	.	.	.	3341
Cook, W. T. (Gladstonian)	.	.	.	.	.	2552
					Majority	789
Bordesley Division:						
COLLINGS, JESSE (L.U.)	.	.	.	.	.	4475
Tait, Lawson (Gladstonian)	.	.	.	.	.	1040
					Majority	3435

due in the main to the power of the metropolitan press. In the boroughs as a whole, Home Rule fell nearly as low. So much for Schnadhorst as to them. CHAP.
XXXIII.
Æt. 49.

The counties were worse. There the Unionists carried two-thirds of the seats. When the preceding elections were won under the new franchise in the late autumn of 1885—and later when the Conservative Government was turned out on the Birmingham policy of the acres and the cow—the rural labourers, as yet untutored in politics, had supposed that substantial felicity was nigh. Gladstone, like “the Theban eagle” of politics, sailing through “deepes of air”, ignored potato plots and cabbage patches.

By comparison with supreme exaltation the reaction of the common agricultural mind was prosaic. Even Joseph Arch was beaten—“the three acres and a cow fallacy did him a good deal of damage, for too many of the labourers expected to have them at once”. The Rev. W. Tuckwell had been an apostle amongst the Hodges; his zeal for the rural part of the Birmingham programme had been millennial. In his *Reminiscences of a Radical Parson* he records:

The loss of Chamberlain alone was an immeasurable disaster; his influence with the democracy had for some time past exceeded Gladstone's. . . . In any case, the energy of a Parliament created for social reform was to be spent on prolonged struggle over a subject which had formed no part of the election programme. Working men would find that their devotion had been thrown away, their confidence abused, the promised reforms to which they gave their votes postponed indefinitely, if not altogether sacrificed, to a measure of which no one amongst them had ever heard.¹

Without boon or hope in July 1886, the Hodges in large numbers stayed away from the polls. As a result, notes Mr. Tuckwell, “the tide flowed against us steadily and not undeservedly”.

The homely person whom Mr. Gladstone with perverse disparagement called “a certain Mr. Jesse Collings” had, after all, moved the amendment which restored the sublime man to power. Gladstone would have been scandalised to learn that the name of the humble Jesse and his manifesto to the agricul-

¹ Pp. 59-60.

BOOK
VII.
1886.

tural labourers—perhaps the sublime man never heard of it—had been of more effect in the counties than all the venerable Prime Minister's Irish orations. But it was so. For years the Birmingham grip on the British social question foiled the Irish appeal of Gladstonian Liberalism.

XI

The General Election was over in the high summer of 1886. A century away seemed that other General Election of seven months before, when Radicals up to the polls dreamed of a new heaven and a new earth. In the English and Welsh boroughs the Gladstonians numbered only 69 by comparison with 120 Liberals returned at the preceding appeal. In the English and Welsh counties the Gladstonians numbered only 83 as against 152 Liberals formerly elected on Chamberlain's agrarian policy. The total Unionist majority in the new House of Commons would be 118.

No such swift reversal of positions had been known. On these events Chamberlain commented:

June 26.—To Harcourt.—I wish you success for many reasons—one being that I bet R. Churchill £20 to £10 that you would have a good majority. I would have given him 5 to 1 if he had asked it, as I knew you are as safe as the Bank. . . . I have a feeling that the "arm chair" politicians will settle you this time in spite of triumphal progresses and the applause of the multitude. . . . I fear there is no hope of my being thrown out.

July 19.—To the same.— . . . The result of the campaign is much what I anticipated. You remember that I told you at the beginning of the discussion that you would be beaten on Second Reading if you did not make the concessions asked for. I fancy you were badly served by your new Whips all through, and Mr. Gladstone was so determined to deny me the slightest influence or following that he never took the trouble to consider the possibility of removing my opposition. I repeat what I have said to you before, that I was most anxious to retire from a position which I hated but I had no choice given me. . . .

Harcourt in reply hit the nail on the head: Mr. Gladstone could not have secured Chamberlain without alienating Par-

nell. For over a year, in a manner almost unbelievable to-day—Salisbury and Churchill being Parnell's dependants first, Gladstone and Morley afterwards—the uncrowned king of Ireland had been a dictator in British politics. That phase was over.

CHAP.
XXXIII.
ÆT. 50.

On July 21 the Queen accepted the resignation of Mr. Gladstone and his Cabinet. Through seven months, like nothing seen before or after, political fortunes had swayed this way and that with stupendous vicissitudes. At the end of it, Chamberlain's single-handed power stood out. Scarred by the battle, embittered by calumny, harder of heart and brain, he appeared in the eyes of his own people as that David who had overthrown two Goliaths. Immitigable enmity saw nothing in him now but what was jealous and sinister, and depicted him henceforth as the great malignant. Enmity itself, none the less, paid tribute to his strength. Liberals and Nationalists called him Mephistopheles, just as the Tories had recently called him Robespierre. A few months before, after the junction of Gladstone and Parnell, the aspect of their alliance looked colossal. The old Prime Minister, shaking off all the humiliating restraints of his second Ministry, was, as we saw, master of a Cabinet as he had never been. "I don't care *that* for Mr. Chamberlain."¹

In truth, the Radical rival who had come so close to the succession seemed devoted to ruin in the spring. Were not his former forces dispersed or captured? His connections cut off all round? His weapons broken and his armour stripped from him? His social programme for Great Britain swept aside like his warning instincts on the Irish Question? Nearly everyone and everything he had reckoned on in politics were lost to him—Morley, Dilke, Harcourt, Schnadhorst, and the great party machine. For a while even the allegiance of his city had been in doubt.

If he went out of office, taking his political life in his hand, after that he made no mistake amidst the complicated dangers surrounding him. In little more than three months, by extraordinary wariness and uttermost courage, he had pulled down the whole power of the Gladstone-Parnell combination.

That Chamberlain turned the scales in the national struggle is a fact of history admitting of no doubt. Against Home Rule,

¹ Tuckwell, *Reminiscences of a Radical Parson*, p. 57.

BOOK
VIL
1886.

as Gladstone in his haste and glow went about it, Whigs and Conservatives would have acted together in any case. It is certain that without the Radical they could not have defeated the Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons. The voting in the constituencies was close enough to show that his action just made all the difference. Whether he could have done it, or even held Birmingham, without the immense reinforcement of John Bright's influence, is doubtful. On that side alone he owed something to fortune. Otherwise, fortune in this case showed no favour to the bold, and he fought through without it.

With him and his social programme, Home-Rule-All-Round beginning with Ireland would have swept the country. The new democracy would have overborne at need the House of Lords, and Radical reform would have made long strides.

XII

Few Liberals now but admit that, between the precipitate impulse of December and the *débâcle* of July, Mr. Gladstone's method was wrong from beginning to end; and that in dealing with English parties, Parnell's manipulating statecraft, sound as triumphant up to a point, was fallacious afterwards. He counted that he could "get more from the Old Man", but did not understand that the England he had to deal with was little likely to put itself at Gladstone's disposition for the purpose.

While Gladstone offered what he could not give, Chamberlain could have given what he offered.

No more was Parnell to hold the balance of power. Ireland could not block the way; Chamberlain had cleared it for many a year. The last resorts of obstruction were to be broken by the force of new rules of procedure; the House of Commons was to be restored to normal working.

Amongst those in the leading rank of politics the Radical Unionist was never again to find friends like the old friends. Through no fault of his own, he was fated, in his turn, not to prevail in the constructive part of his Irish policy. But his campaign of 1886, single-handed in its beginnings, is of its kind unequalled in the fighting records of English politics. He had been under-estimated by comparison with Mr. Gladstone's

majesty. No man, no number of men, ought to have underestimated him again. When they did, they rued, as this biography will have to show in several great connections.

CHAP.
XXXIII.
Æt. 50.

But by nature this Unionist with a difference still abhorred Toryism, still clung to Liberalism. Chamberlain did not give up his hopes of reunion for more than two years. In the thick of the General Election of 1886, throwing the weaker prudence to the winds, he published his letter to the Chairman of his Election Committee:

I do not seek or deserve Conservative aid. When the complications caused by the sudden introduction of the Home Rule and Land Bills have passed away, I cannot doubt that I shall again receive the strenuous opposition of all consistent Conservatives.

When the polling is over, he writes (July 23) to Sir Henry James:

I believe that the force of circumstances will bring about a reunion under Hartington. . . . We ought to assume the desire for reunion and show ourselves ready to meet it. I hope that we shall all take our seats on the front Opposition bench as a kind of evidence of continued solidarity. The Gladstonites dare not object openly, and it will be well received by the Liberal Party in the country. It is the proper place for those who claim to be still Liberal leaders.

There was one unpleasant fact to guard him from such elation as courts the displeasure of the gods. In the Unionist majority of 118, Chamberlain as yet could not count, for any positive programme, upon more than a dozen of firm personal adherents. Still, and for years to come, he would have to rely upon himself against the world. His political course was clouded with doubt round every point of his compass.

BOOK VIII

1886—1889

CHAPTER XXXIV

LORD RANDOLPH'S FALL—THE ROUND TABLE AND ITS COLLAPSE

(JULY 1886—APRIL 1887)

No Coalition—Lord Salisbury's Government and the Radical Unionist—His Dread of Reaction—A Visit to the East—Chamberlain and Churchill—Lord Randolph's Resignation—Chamberlain's Signal to Liberalism—The Round Table Fiasco—Old Friends as New Enemies—A Collapse and a Sequel—Gladstone and Chamberlain—Meeting and Parting.

I

WOULD the coming Ministry be a Conservative Government or a Coalition? At this point of transition to another era in public affairs, it was a searching question. The Radical Unionist did most to decide it. No one now doubts his judgment. He was to be out of office for nearly ten years. But it was impossible for him then to enter a mainly Conservative Cabinet and unsafe for Hartington to join without him. As it proved, the two Liberal Unionist sections were more powerful on the Opposition benches as independent and conditional allies of the Conservative Ministerialists.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

As early as mid-July, before the polling was completed, Hartington wrote to Highbury: "I do not expect Lord Salisbury will take office without making desperate efforts to form a Coalition".¹ The Whig chief showed no feeling of his own against this solution, though expecting from Birmingham an adverse opinion. It was trenchant:

TO HARTINGTON

Highbury, July 16, 1886.—I am enjoying myself very much here, and am revelling in the delights of Capua, that is to say that I am playing

¹ Hartington to Chamberlain, July 15, 1886.

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

lawn tennis and reading French novels—the while accompanied by unlimited tobacco. . . . As to the situation: of course I could not join any Coalition; it would be absurd in me, and I need not argue it. With you it is somewhat different. You might join and be perfectly consistent. But if you do, you must make up your mind to cease to be, or call yourself, a Liberal. The force of circumstances will be irresistible, and you will be absorbed in the great Constitutional Party. The fate of the Peelites will be the fate of the Hartingtonians—they will be probably swallowed up and digested. . . .¹

About a week later Lord Salisbury offered the Premiership to Hartington, who—mainly on account of the position of the Radical Unionists—put aside honourably his last chance of realising what was up to then and for some further period the latent ambition of his life.

In the course of conversation he [Salisbury] excluded Chamberlain, and said he thought it would be too sharp a curve for both him and Chamberlain to sit in the same Cabinet. This, I think, was really conclusive. Although Chamberlain would not have joined, the fact of my not being able to ask him would remove any possibility of the Government being in public estimation anything but a Conservative one.²

Next day the Whig leader informed Highbury that he renounced the Premiership.

Contrary feelings swaying the Radical Unionist after the General Election are a singular study:

As regards assurances to Salisbury, he ought not to expect nor to receive any but the most general promises. . . . It is impossible to foresee events or predict what the Tories will do. If they are not fools they will give us some intimation from time to time of their intentions, and we can deal with each occasion as it arises.³

He does not love “the Tories” one whit more than before. But what of Liberalism?

If he [Gladstone] retired, all would come right pretty quickly. If he remains, it is no use issuing manifestoes or anything else. . . . I believe

¹ Chamberlain to Hartington, July 16, 1886 (*Holland's Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. pp. 168-169).

² *Ibid.* p. 171 (July 24, 1886).

³ Chamberlain to Sir Henry James, July 23, 1886.



CROSS-ROADS

S-l-sb-ry. "Hullo! Aren't you fellows going further with me?"
From the cartoon by Sir John Tenniel reproduced in *Punch*, July 31, 1886,
by kind permission of the Proprietors

we must "lie low" till the inevitable disappearance of the G.O.M. from the scene.¹

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

Gladstone's stretched longevity was the unexpected factor and upon them all, more or less, it would impose other intentions than they had now. Meanwhile, Chamberlain's genuine longing for Liberal reunion without any submission of his to obtain it is the peculiar paradox of this chapter.

II

The next question touched parliamentary business and future policy. In reply to Hartington's further enquiries into the difficult Radical's state of mind, Chamberlain on August 1 answered with continued clearness and initiative.

He argued in effect that neither negation nor reaction would hold the country against Home Rule. Autumn in Ireland would bring serious agrarian disorders. "I expect that rent will be withheld, and if evictions follow on a large scale I suppose they will provoke outrages." How quick and right was this anticipation of agrarian developments in Ireland the "Plan of Campaign" was soon to prove. He went on:

I am very strongly in favour of the immediate announcement of a small Royal Commission to enquire into the Land question. This is the foundation of Irish discontent, and all authorities are agreed that it should be settled first. If it were settled, I doubt if Home Rule would any longer be a burning question. My idea is that the Commission should be non-political and consist of really practical men. . . .²

Further, for relieving the poverty and remedying the backwardness of Ireland, he advised a great programme of public works on the lines which he had been advocating for years, and such as Mr. Balfour subsequently executed.

What of political reform in that other island—Great Britain?

As regards Local Government in all its forms, I think that the Cabinet should consider the question carefully and decide how far they will go. Then, let them introduce their scheme in February in the shape of

¹ Chamberlain to Jesse Collings, July 29, 1886.

² Chamberlain to Hartington, August 1, 1886.

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

resolutions and refer these to a very strong—perhaps a Joint—Committee of both Houses to consider and report.

The author of these early suggestions was to be the soul of constructive energy in the Unionist alliance from beginning to end. But he addressed reluctant minds. The spirit of these counsels was not to be well heeded until the alienation of popular feeling jeopardised the whole Unionist position in the constituencies. Most Conservatives and Whigs thought that Home Rule and Gladstone had received their death-blow in the first shock. Chamberlain knew better. The battle of July might prove a delusive victory leading to the loss of a long war unless the advantage now won were vigorously improved by creative policy.

In Lord Salisbury he had no faith and, as yet, no ground for it. From the conventional composition of the new administration as a whole, he feared either negation which would fail or reaction which he must combat. His only sympathetic bond with the Ministry was Lord Randolph, his admired friend but a brilliant exception. Could Churchill leaven the lump? That was the coming question as the Radical saw it in the late summer of 1886.

When the new Parliament assembled in the first week of August, an important question of forms and symbolisms had to be settled. Where should the leaders of dissentient Liberalism place themselves? Hartington was inclined to go below the gangway. Chamberlain insisted that they should assert their right as Liberal leaders, though Unionists, to sit on the Front Opposition Bench with Gladstone and his lieutenants. His view prevailed. Through six years this curious proximity, though it suited Chamberlain's sardonic strain—the "wicked" part of his coolness—became more and more trying to others. At the moment the arrangement was benevolently approved by Gladstone. When Parliament met he held out to Chamberlain a hand willingly taken.

III

Nothing could restrain for long the innate rancour of the feud. Chamberlain must bear his full share of the blame; but while his better efforts were repeated, the virulence of Irish Nationalist

attack never ceased. Above all, two old friends estranged were mutual irritants with an evil effect—as soon we shall find—upon hopes of a Liberal eirenicon. Morley could not refrain from sharpening his allusions, nor Chamberlain from barbing his retorts. It had come to this, that of all the leading personalities in politics these two, once close as brothers, were in morbid animosity. Often when nominally answering others they were in oblique and provocative conflict such as neither could mistake.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
ÆT. 50.

Chamberlain was, in fact, replying to Morley as well as Parnell when, on August 26, towards the end of the protracted debate on the Address, he spoke for the first time in the new Parliament. "I am not going to vote for an amendment equivalent to a vote of censure on the Government. I shall do nothing to turn out the Government so long as the Government which would take its place is committed to a Separatist policy." Uncompromising on this main point, biting in manner, cheered to the echo by the Conservatives, the speech was groaned at and mocked by the Irish benches, who called him, of course, more Tory than the Tories themselves. Not so. Conditionally on the maintenance of the Union as security, Chamberlain in this speech advocated the abolition of dual ownership in Ireland and the transfer of the whole of its soil to the tenants by a great system of State-aided purchase.

This distinctive line of intervention marked the beginning of an unchecked increase of parliamentary power. Uncertainty as to the line a strong personality out of office may take gives power in the House of Commons. In this new House, freedom from official restraints and a masculine individuality of view raised Chamberlain towards his height as a debater. Lord Randolph slipped over a prophetic note from the Treasury: "You made a splendid speech last night. It is curious but true that you have more effect on the Tory party than either Salisbury or myself."

John Bright wrote next day from Perthshire:

August 28.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN—. . . I look on the chaos with something like disgust and wonder that anyone should place the blame anywhere but on Mr. Gladstone, at whose door lies the confusion which prevails. I hope he may not return to office until purged of the errors

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

which now afflict him. . . . We have dry weather here, the rivers are very low, and there is no fishing.

The Radical seceder was further than the old tribune from being happy. His personal adherents in the House had been reduced by the General Election to a handful. Longing to quit a parliamentary scene he had ceased to care for, he took no further part in the session. He confesses his mood to Dilke.

September 11.—For myself I am very dull and generally disgusted with the present state of things. I keep wishing that I were out of it altogether, but as I do not know what else to do I have not the courage to break with public life. I hope that my two months' freedom will give me new interest in my work. I am disgracefully well physically but I suppose a change of thought is wanted for my temper and my intellect.

From Highbury he reiterates to Hartington that the Government on their own motion ought to have made serious concessions on the Irish Land question:

TO HARTINGTON

September 7.— . . . If, as I gather, Parnell's Bill ¹ is to carry out suggestions that I have already publicly supported, I could not possibly vote against it. . . . As far as I can see at present it would certainly be better for all Radical Unionists to stay away. . . . As to yourself, I incline to think that you should keep away also. If you vote with the Government, and we do not, it marks a distinction between different sections of Unionists and encourages the Separatists to try and widen the rift by new proposals. . . .

September 9.— . . . Our great difficulty is that in order to preserve the Union we are forced to keep the Tory Government in power. But every time we vote with them we give a shock to the ordinary Liberal politician outside and, if we do it too often, we shall be completely identified with the Tories and shall lose all chance of recovering the lead of the Liberal party.

Our real policy is never to vote with the Tories unless they are in danger and to vote against them whenever we can safely do so. This policy would be the best for them as well as for us, for if we lose our hold on Liberal opinion we can bring them no strength on critical

¹ For enabling tenants to apply for reduction of judicial rents in view of the great fall in prices.

occasions. . . . If you are quite determined to vote and speak for the Government, I won't bother you with any more arguments, but I am really impressed with the impolicy of such a course.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

In isolation he was, if anything, more than ever stubborn and shrewd. The short session closed on September 25 with a Queen's Speech more significant of the new era than has been noticed by historians. "There is on all sides a growing desire to draw closer in every practicable way the bonds which unite the various portions of the Empire." This was the first official accent of the new Imperialism. By degrees it came to dominate the next fifteen years as the result of imaginative reaction amongst the majority of England against Gladstone's method—disintegrating in effect and suggestion as it seemed to the stronger part of English instinct.

IV

Early in October, after chafing under many delays, Chamberlain started on his journey to Constantinople and Greece, and was abroad for more than two months.

It was an unusually excited moment in the Balkans. The kidnapping and abdication of King Alexander of Bulgaria had once more inflamed the Eastern Question, that perpetual and at last dooming threat to the world's peace.

All Europe talked when the famous Radical on November 5 was received by the Sultan in an audience of an hour's duration. To Abdul Hamid he recommended a great scheme of Ottoman railways anticipating the fateful German conception of the Bagdad trunk-line and its feeders. In Athens he dined with the King and had long conversations both with that sovereign and the Greek Premier, Tricoupis.¹ With their father were Austen and Beatrice, the latter as nearly a replica of their father as a girl can be. Better than any serious summary is Chamberlain's playful letter to two of his younger children:

Corfu, December 2, 1886.—DEAR IDA AND HILDA—Turkey is an interesting country with no resemblance to the bird of that name. The people live chiefly on tobacco and coffee, and the dogs bark all night and sleep

¹ Of these conversations Chamberlain—strongly pro-Greek, but pro-Bulgar also—sent a full account to Sir William White, the British Ambassador at Constantinople.

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

all day. They are not muzzled, but the Press is, and the newspapers come out with large blanks in the columns which have been cut before they are published because some official considers the contents dangerous to the safety of the Empire. . . . Everything has to be carried on the backs of porters, who bear enormous loads. The first day we got to Constantinople, we met a string of these men each carrying a grand piano on his back.

I saw the Sultan the day I left. He is a little timid-looking man who speaks in a low voice and looks as if he found his Sultanship a great bore. . . . I had a cigarette with his Majesty, and gave him a lot of good advice, in return for which he gave me a gold box covered with diamonds.

From Constantinople we went straight to Athens. . . . The children are most of them very pretty with beautiful eyes. They are also very good, and do not bother their papas to write letters to them. It is true that papas in Greek are the priests, and not their fathers, but I don't think this ought to make any difference.

We all dined one evening at the palace with the King and Queen and their family. I sat next to the young princess who is about 15. She told me she got up at 7 and had lessons all day with only intervals for meals. I pitied her very much, and advised her to make a revolution. I told her that English children only worked from nine till one, and had a whole holyday every Saturday and lots of holydays besides. But then they can't speak four languages and three quarters like my princess. . . . We had a public meeting at a village in the mountains, where the whole population turned out to welcome His Excellency—and at another place the school children were drawn up and sang a song of rejoicing. All this has made the other members of the party very jealous, and they have pushed themselves forward and made themselves prominent in the hope of being mistaken for a distinguished statesman whom modesty forbids me to mention. It was all to no purpose, as the populace with instinctive discretion at once recognised the signs of genius in the commanding presence and great carriage of the aforesaid whom modesty, etc. . . .

The tour confirmed his old attachment to Greece and his new belief in Bulgaria. The political and commercial ideas formed on this journey will have to be noticed again at a much later point of this narrative.

He arrived home again twelve days before Christmas, little

dreaming that politics were on the eve of an earthquake threatening to topple the whole Unionist fabric.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
ART. 50.

V

In the Radical Unionist's eyes, Lord Randolph Churchill was the only attractive personality in the Conservative Ministry and the only safeguard against Tory reaction.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the House of Commons had risen to his zenith while the Radical Unionist was abroad. In his Dartford and Bradford speeches,¹ speaking in the tone of a co-Premier, he adopted the appeal of the "un-authorised programme" for the British agricultural labourers, foreshadowed a new local government system, advocated equal treatment for Ireland, adjured Conservatives to cement by a progressive spirit the alliance with the Liberal Unionists, and pronounced on foreign affairs in the tone of a European statesman. After some months of political torpor these speeches were events.

Following the great Dartford demonstration, and a few days before Chamberlain left for the Continent, he had received from the Chancellor of the Exchequer a very lively letter—mentioning Gallipoli, one day to mean something to Randolph's son:

LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL TO CHAMBERLAIN

Treasury Chambers, October 4, 1886.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN—Don't be cross with me for saying that I think you are a little changeable. You told me your thoughts on Irish Local Government. We ought to proceed by resolution and Committee, and on that basis the Government have hitherto sketched out their plans in their own minds. Now, apparently, you want us to bring in next year a cut-and-dried bill.

I do not think land legislation in Ireland will press next year. The Commission cannot report till Easter time (at least I hope not), and for land purchase Ashbourne's bill will amply suffice for the demands of another year. . . .

About foreign policy. Italy, if my information is correct, is bound hand and foot to Bismarck and will move *pari passu* with Berlin. France is impossible, quarrelsome as the devil, and Italy hates her. Tripoli is

¹ October 2 and October 26.

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

a fine bone of contention. I think you will see by what I said on Saturday,¹ if you read between the lines, which you can do, that the foreign policy of this country on the Eastern question has undergone a profound modification and has closely approximated to what were your ideas when in opposition in 1876-78.

We shall walk very cautiously and avoid war like the devil, but remember even you were nearly ready to go to war for . . . Greece. I do pray you not to fill Tricoupis' head full of wind. . . . Mind you see White at Constantinople and give him sound House of Commons news.

Also, try and take an opportunity of examining Gallipoli. One never knows what may happen, and it is just as well to know all about places. . . .

John Morley laughed,

You will not get a bounteous affluence of fresh water into the Tory pump by the simple act of fitting it with a brand-new Radical handle, kindly lent for the occasion by a friend from Birmingham.²

When Chamberlain came home on December 13 he was full of desires for Liberal reunion, though almost despairing of means to achieve it. The very next day he wrote to Dr. Dale: "I greatly fear that we are in for a prolonged period of reaction". A week before, he had telegraphed from abroad, to a Unionist meeting at Willis's Rooms under Hartington's chairmanship, that if Gladstone were willing to moderate his policy the Liberal sections should confer—a message received with glacial dislike by those to whom it was read.³

Behind the scenes were singular workings. Just before Christmas, Lord Randolph and Chamberlain were again in touch on a situation disquieting enough for the Radical Unionist but not yet hinting catastrophe for the Tory Democrat.

LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL TO CHAMBERLAIN

December 19.—I repeated to Lord Salisbury all you told me about Greece, and your views with which he was much interested. I also pressed him to recommend the appointment of a suitable consul at Janina.

¹ At Dartford, October 2, 1886.

² Address to the National Liberal

Federation, Leeds, November 3, 1886.

³ December 7, 1886.

With respect to Local Government, I pressed him and Mr. Goschen very hard to give up the idea of *ex officio* representation, and possibly my arguments may not be altogether without effect.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

In the meantime, if you are speaking in public soon, I think it would be well that you should not shirk the question of Local Government but deal fully and frankly with it, though if possible avoiding an attitude menacing to the Government, which might be misunderstood by the Gladstonians. You ought to encourage us to deal liberally with the matter.

Please let me beg of you to keep all the budget schemes I broached to you very secret. Only one other person outside the Government has an inkling of them, and any premature publicity or announcements or comments in the Press would destroy me.

I told Lord Salisbury that, whether on foreign affairs or on any necessity for coercion, you were prepared to give his policy a generous consideration, but that on Local Government you were irreconcilable, and that anything which you considered reactionary in that policy might probably drive you into the arms of the Gladstonians.¹

On the same date, Lord Rothschild, after a conversation with the young Chancellor, wrote in alarm to Chamberlain that concerning County Councils the Government were full of undemocratic ideas of checks and restrictions. Churchill had represented to the Prime Minister, from his knowledge of Chamberlain's views, that in this case "the Liberal Unionist Party would certainly be split up". Lord Rothschild added his own premonition—Salisbury "if driven too hard might jib".² Chamberlain replied immediately that County Councils, when proposed, must be wholly representative. If the Government framed a Bill on any other basis, "unbelievable mischief will be done".

On the day when this severe warning was written, the Chancellor of the Exchequer tempted the gods, and they rejected him. Protesting against rising estimates for the army and navy, he sent in his first offer of resignation. Disquiet mingled with his feverishness, but he quelled his uneasy instinct and decided not to believe that he might be taken at his word.

Two nights later, the brightest star of politics, as the firma-

¹ This important letter, three days before the crash, is published here for the first time.

² Rothschild to Chamberlain, December 19, 1886.

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

ment then showed, shot madly from its sphere. Without a word of warning to his ally at Highbury, Randolph Churchill committed the act of political suicide unparalleled. Not foreseeing the dawn of Imperial democracy; not foreseeing that a more ominous age of alliances and armaments was at hand; not foreseeing that the British fleet would have to be strengthened at all costs by deliberate and unprecedented measures—he so managed his affair that the average citizen saw nothing in his conduct but cheese-paring and crass resistance to safer provision for navy and army. That single impression ruined him in the estimation of the mass of his party at a time when both services were below any rational standard of preparation and when many Liberals like Dilke, as well as all Conservatives and Whigs, felt that it was life and death to reconstruct and enlarge the whole system of British sea-power.

Lord Randolph, in a word, affronted the deepest instinct of the Conservative party, and staked himself on a policy which only a Radical majority could have asserted. Better not to have resigned at all, and certainly not then. No man is big enough to resign in the first session of a new Parliament, though usually even an ordinary Minister may resign with effect in the third.

But were he to resign indeed with a chance of keeping his power over Tory democracy, he ought to have concerted with Highbury. He should have challenged Lord Salisbury on the ground that an anti-democratic or non-democratic spirit would sap the Unionist alliance and destroy the Union itself.

Between 1881 and 1886, Lord Randolph's appeal to belligerent patriotism had made him. But it was his nature to be fascinated on reflection by ideas which he had impulsively denounced; and his desire to imitate his former opponents led him to forget the distinctive secret of his own popular power. Self-doomed in this way, his fate was one of the three terrible personal tragedies of that merciless half-decade. As irretrievably for public reasons as Dilke and Parnell for private causes, Lord Randolph fell—thrown "sheer o'er the crystal battlements of heaven."

On Christmas Eve, Chamberlain received Churchill's melancholy confession:

CHURCHILL TO CHAMBERLAIN

Treasury Chambers, December 24, 1886.—Your letter just received and your speech gave me equal delight. I told you a ministerial crisis was coming when you dined with me, but I own I did not think that I should have failed to persuade Lord S. to take a broad view of the situation. I had no choice but to go. He had been for weeks prepared for it and possibly courted the crash. . . . I hear the Carlton would like to tear me limb from limb. . . .

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

Lord Randolph never was arbiter again. To many of the younger generation in that age he was one of the most attractive personalities who ever shone in English politics. But he had that most perilous touch—genius without control; without the primary requisite of check on impulse. Far the more romantic, mobile and captivating of the two men we must here compare, he was quicksilver where Chamberlain was iron. But at the time this was not so generally foreseen. A good many young Conservatives, and some older, thought that Lord Salisbury's position would be ruined before long and that Churchill would come back as master.

VI

Like the nation at large, Chamberlain on December 23 saw the almost unbelievable announcement in the newspapers and was thunder-struck. His immediate conclusion was that his fears during the last five months were verified; that Toryism in the lump was bad, and unteachable; and that a reactionary majority of the Cabinet, gaining the upper hand, had forced out the only enlightened Minister.

About Churchill's wild loss of all sense of proportion in dealing with principles and persons Chamberlain as yet knew nothing. Yet quickly he had to make up his mind.

Politics, never decided by purely personal feelings, are happily never quite uninfluenced by them. That very morning the Unionist, still Radical, had received a letter sounding old chords and giving him as much pleasure as the news in *The Times* caused consternation. Craving for a little humanity in his new and dreary political life, thinking of old times, Chamberlain wanted to send a sign to Morley, yet doubted. If he made

BOOK VIII. 1886-87. the advance and found it ill-received, his nature would not brook it, and all would be over for ever between them. Frankly, "Casca" yielded to impulse and sent the "powder-monkey" a barrel of oysters, as for many a Christmas before, hoping that their slight Unionist flavour would not make them much less palatable. Morley's reply enchanted him, and might well. It seemed a letter perfectly touched with tenderness and true regret amidst the spite of things:

MORLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

December 22.—Your letter has given me the liveliest pleasure, and I shall eat your oysters with a relish exceeding that of previous years. A squeeze of Separatist lemon will disguise the Unionist flavour, and I shall give myself up to all the old and delightful associations which this *annus detestabilis* has clouded but which I believe neither of us would wish to efface.

As it happens, no later than Sunday last, I wrote in reply to a letter from Dale something which I rather thought he might show you on Monday evening. But I believe the opportunity did not arise. I am not sorry—for as it is, we see that the other had something of the same sort in his mind.

I have often thought it a pity that we had not had a plain conversation together, as to the personal matters between us. They would easily have been cleared away. I am sorry for any too sharp word that heat may have betrayed me into—and I know that you would say the same.

The future is too obscure for anticipation. Nothing can ever happen to me so painful, so miserable, as the events of this year.

Chamberlain was Hotspur in this—however opposite in his reckoning gift—that he took suggestion as a cat laps milk. We may well imagine how this letter worked upon him, coming as it did with the staring news in the journals of what he conceived to be Lord Randolph's expulsion by the heavy forces of the "stupid party".

In spite of all, the Liberals, like his townfolk, were "his own people". The season nourished memory and wishes. Might there be a Christmas Book in politics, or was the thought too like Dickens? Was it possible to restore the warmth of political life and friendship? Might Liberalism reunited become greater than

before? Like himself, the Radicals generally in Birmingham were restive and cheerless under the Conservative regime. And Randolph, not Lord Salisbury, was the peculiar idol of Tory democracy in the Midlands.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

VII

For that evening (December 23) Chamberlain, as it chanced, was engaged to face a difficult meeting. Not only had he to address his constituents in the West Birmingham division. He had been summoned to frank parley with members of the Divisional Council who disagreed sharply with him on the Irish Question. This was a sudden and severe pinch—another of those tests of political nerve to which most of his life was subject. In the course of the critical day he made up his mind after his habit—not weakly.

That night, in all the newspaper offices, and next morning amongst the readers, Chamberlain's appeal for Liberal reunion doubled the excitement caused by the Churchill explosion. Within twenty-four hours the second of two battering shocks seemed to threaten the stability and repute of Unionism and of the Salisbury Government.

After six months of depression and rayless gloom, the Home Rulers, British and Irish, felt that the "heavenly bodies"—to recall Mr. Gladstone's diction—were revolving in auspicious conjunction.

Crowded was the meeting in the Ellen Street Board School. The understood object was

perfectly frank conference on the part of the members with Mr. Chamberlain, and that those who disagreed with his line of action in reference to the Irish question might have the opportunity of expressing their opinions and making Mr. Chamberlain acquainted with the grounds on which they were based.

To the Member for West Birmingham many questions were put and answered in the best of temper.

After that, he rose again to make his speech on the Ministerial crisis and the future of the Liberal party. He spoke with his expert phrasing—discriminating but decided. He defended Lord Randolph as a Liberal without knowing it. "I confess it seems

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

to me possible—I fear it is probable—that the old Tory influences have gained the upper hand and that we may be face to face with a Tory Government whose proposals no consistent Liberal will be able to support.”

Then he asked what was to be the future of Liberalism:

What are the Gladstonian Liberals going to do? It seems to me that they have a great and perhaps a final opportunity. Remember, as has been truly said here to-night, that we Liberals are agreed upon ninety-nine points of our programme; we only disagree upon one. . . .

We are agreed, I say, upon I believe every important point of Liberal policy as affecting England, Scotland and Wales. Do you not think that these three countries have some claim upon us? Do not you think they have a right to put pressure upon their leaders to do those things upon which we are agreed? . . .

But I go further than that. I say even upon Irish matters, when I look into the thing, I am more surprised at the number of points upon which we are agreed than at the remainder upon which for the present we must be content to differ. . . . Without solving this land question Home Rule is impossible; and I believe that if you solve it, Home Rule will be unnecessary. . . .

Now came the idea of three men and a table:

I believed it was possible to devise a plan—I have never doubted it—I am convinced now that, sitting round a table and coming together in a spirit of compromise and conciliation, almost any three men, leaders of the Liberal party, although they may hold opposite views upon another branch of the question, would yet be able to arrange some scheme which would fulfil the conditions I have laid down, which would not involve unnecessary or unfair risk to the British taxpayer, and yet would make in a short time the Irish tenant owner of the land he cultivates. . . .

Even upon this question of local government, the difference recedes if you come to think of it. We are all agreed, I imagine, as to the nature of a plan to be applied to England and Scotland. We are all agreed to apply it in principle at all events, with such alteration of detail as may be necessary, to the sister country of Ireland. We are prepared, none more so than I, to decentralise the system of administration which is known as Dublin Castle. . . .

Is it not possible now once more that we may make an honest attempt, if not to agree upon every point, at least to agree upon this—that we will proceed to carry out all those vast changes, all those important reforms upon which there is no difference; and that we will leave it to time and to experience and to free and frank discussion to say whether when we have accomplished all these we shall not go one step farther in the direction of the views of those who now unfortunately are our opponents? . . .

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

My life is bound up in Birmingham; all its institutions, its prosperity, its politics have been my care and principal thought for the whole course of my political life. I know its people. Your faces, if not your names, are familiar to me. As I walk through the streets I seem to gather instinctively the minds of the people.¹

This is the stuff and texture of common sense—a roll of good cloth ready for cutting. Undoubtedly, his idea of next steps in practical politics is the only short way to Radical reform for British democracy. Undoubtedly, it is Ireland's only short way to land settlement and large self-government.

But—it restates precisely Chamberlain's position before the rejection of the Home Rule Bill. It puts the Irish land question first. It refuses to look at the Celtic demand for a nationalist legislature. It involves postponement of Gladstonian policy to a future to which Gladstone will not belong. Still treating Parnell with his party as not a ruling but a subordinate factor, Chamberlain proposes by inference to dispense with that connection. The persuasive appeal that others shall be conciliatory comes from one who himself does not budge an inch.

A large part of his audience had been full of refractory feelings when the meeting began. When it ended, they all dispersed in a melted and fraternal mood, in tune with Christmas, loving him and each other. Whether, as regards the managing part of his brain—very different from the combative part—he ever made a more characteristic speech is doubtful. He ingeminated peace and desired it, yet with innate tenacity he wanted his own way. His sincere offer was the metallic imitation of an olive-branch. It is a curious study of the incessantly active type

¹ Meeting of Liberal Divisional Council at West Birmingham, December 23, 1886.

BOOK
VIII.

1886-87.

of man who knows about as little as may be of self-conscious psychology.

Next morning, Christmas Eve, the country rang with his call to a truce. Everywhere it suited the season as well as the bewildering situation. In the next few days congratulations made the Highbury letter-bag as heavy and cheerful as the own sack of Santa Claus. Longing for reunion, all the old Birmingham group, Dale, Collings, Harris and the rest, were enraptured. Hoarse wrath sounded from the other side of the Irish Channel; Sexton, the Irish orator, who had thought it good to say of Chamberlain that "intellectually he is a Mayor still", now warned Birmingham that land was much but nationality more. This went to the root of the matter. A newspaper of calibre, the *Scotsman*, saw as clearly in another direction when it remarked that on what the Home Rulers called their "vital principle, it must be observed that Mr. Chamberlain does not yield an inch". But many Gladstonians informed Highbury that they were sick of the strife.

VIII

Far more important was the warm response of Gladstone's second in command. Since the General Election, Harcourt, as regards Home Rule, had never been threatened by a tempera-
ture. His correspondence with Highbury just before the Churchill crisis was intimate and gay. Already he had invited the Radical Unionist to Malwood. He now hailed "with the greatest pleasure any prospect of healing a breach I have always deplored".

HARCOURT TO CHAMBERLAIN

Christmas Eve, 1886.— . . . I therefore do not lose a post in writing to assure you of my earnest desire to co-operate with you in any measures which may tend in any way towards a reunion of the Party. I have, of course, no authority at this moment to speak for anyone but myself (though I have reason not only to hope but to believe that they are like minded), but however that may be, I *speak emphatically for myself and am prepared in any event to act in that sense.* . . . Is there any use our meeting? If so, I will come to London any day next week if I should find you then. . . . You and Randolph have prepared for us a lively

Xmas. It is one of the oddest situations that politics have ever produced, and he must be a very wise prophet who can predict what will come of it. CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

Chamberlain, very gratified, went straight to business:

CHAMBERLAIN TO HARCOURT

December 26.— . . . When I spoke of “three Liberals round a table”, I thought of you, Herschell and Fowler as the three conspicuous Gladstonians who have done nothing to embitter the differences which have arisen and have shown moderation and fairness throughout. To such a Committee I would gladly submit in detail various proposals for dealing with the Land question. I should have confidence that you at least would not use these confidential proposals in subsequent public discussion, nor take advantage of my frankness and endeavour to come to an agreement in order to accuse me afterwards of inconsistency and double-dealing. . . . And, lastly, to prevent misunderstanding, I think I ought to say that I do not contemplate complete personal reunion as the result of any conference or mediation. I have been most bitterly wounded by the injustice and the ingratitude of former associates, and I feel that, for me at any rate, a temporary effacement is a necessary prelude to any future usefulness. But I am sincerely impressed with the danger to Liberalism—to all for which I have struggled and laboured—if present dissensions are allowed to continue. . . .

Harcourt received this with “supreme satisfaction” and pressed for an interview. At his house in Grafton Street the two men met on December 30. Gladstone had given a guarded blessing to the *rapprochement*. The Radical Unionist immediately after this interview made a memorandum of it. As for Home Rule,

I was not hopeful that this difference could be surmounted, and if the intention was to make it the first subject of discussion I should be unwilling to enter the Conference. What I hoped was that we should take into consideration first the matters on which agreement was probable. If we were successful so far, I should be quite ready to see if we could not go farther together and to discuss any alternative plans of self-government which might be brought forward as substitutes for Gladstone’s Bill.¹

¹ Chamberlain’s Notes, Thursday, December 30, 1886.

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

Next day, the last of this convulsed year 1886, the two met again. John Morley was sent for and brought in from the Athenæum Club. Not excluding discussion of any policy or idea touching the Irish Question, political and agrarian, the projected Conference would be held without prejudice, and if it failed initial positions would not be compromised.¹ For this programme Gladstone's official approval was sought and obtained. The preliminaries are explained in a colloquy by post:

CHAMBERLAIN AND HARCOURT

December 28, 1886.—Harcourt.—You may rely upon my cordially co-operating with you. . . . We have been in so many rows together in the course of the last six years that I think we have learned to understand and trust one another.

December 29.—Chamberlain.—I have heard from Hartington and am to see him at 1 P.M. to-morrow. I will come on to you from Devonshire House.

January 1, 1887.—Harcourt.—A telegram from the G.O.M. this morning. . . . "Barkis is willing."

January 2.—Chamberlain.—I saw Hartington again before I left [London], and fear there is no hope of his joining us at present. He seems to think that with you as Faust and someone else as Mephistopheles there is great fear for my virtue. I am not without fear myself, but the temptation is great and I am determined to risk the consequences.

January 3.—Harcourt.—The letters from Hawarden to-day are favourable beyond hope and expectation.

January 4.—Chamberlain.—The extracts from Mr. Gladstone's private letter are *most encouraging and most satisfactory* . . . the outlook is brighter for Liberalism than I could possibly have hoped some weeks ago. [And later on the same day] In re-reading Mr. Gladstone's private letter before returning it to you, I am struck by the absence of all reference to the Land Question. I sincerely hope that this was not intentional . . . no solution of the Irish problem can be other than equivocal which neglects this radical cause of discontent and agitation.

January 5.—Harcourt.—I do not wish you to suppose that Mr. G. by any means desired to exclude that important branch [Land] of the

question.—[*January 6*] It is proposed to hold the first meeting of the "Conference of London" at my house in Grafton Street at 4 P.M. on *Thursday, 13th instant*, and to have a further meeting on *Friday morning at 10 A.M.* so that the folk need only spend one night in town. I suppose you will submit to us your Land Scheme as a *pièce de résistance*.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
ÆT. 50.

January 7.—Chamberlain.—The details of a Land Scheme can only be elaborated in common, and rely much on the resources of other members of the Conference. . . . There is a good deal of grumbling on both sides about what we are doing. . . . But as far as I can see, all the grumblers are men who for one reason or another desire to keep us apart and fear reunion on any terms honourable to both parties. I believe there is a real sense of relief among the majority of Liberals of all sections.

Chamberlain at the outset of the dubious affair was a blend of adventurous optimism and instinctive precaution—taking all the risks of entanglement, knowing they might be unpleasant, but relying upon his adeptness in extrication.

We know, far better than did he at the outset, that though the public benediction of Hawarden was obtained for the Round Table, there never was the faintest chance of agreement. Entering upon another enquiry, Chamberlain himself retained "unlimited liberty of judgment and rejection" just as twelve months before. Similarly the old leader had not changed a jot. The Gladstonians ruled out of their delegation Sir Henry Fowler, suspected of thinking in his heart like Highbury. Representing Wolverhampton, a constituency in the neighbourhood of Birmingham, he had always referred to Chamberlain with a scrupulous moderation very near to sympathy. Hartington, well based on a massive and immovable simplicity, scouted the suggestion that he might join the symposium. It was settled that Chamberlain should bring in Trevelyan. The Gladstonians were a trio—Harcourt, Herschell and John Morley.

And Morley came in unwillingly. To him we may say it was as though having relished a gift of oysters he were summoned to drain the vinegar-cruet. For one thing he seems to have been amongst those Liberals who exulted in the mistaken thought that Lord Randolph's resignation would prove a heavy blow to Unionism. For another thing he knew his old friend too well.

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

He felt that Chamberlain would propose the postponement of other people's principles and yield nothing of his own. Morley himself if it came to peace would have to be a sacrificial victim, garlanded or not. Bristling with suspicion and hostility, he was keen in instinct. Despite his personal pleasure in the Birmingham greetings and oysters at Christmas, his feeling about this negotiation was just what he expressed to Labouchere eight months before—"Chamberlain wants us to go down on our knees and it cannot be done for the money". It was the old choice for Liberalism—Chamberlain or Parnell?

From his insistence on a separate council or assembly for Ulster the Radical Unionist never deviated. How could he, in view of his public declarations, explicit and repeated? He sent an emphatic reassurance to Hartington when pressing him to join the parley. The appeal was enough in itself to show how little he was prepared to alter his mind.

TO HARTINGTON

January 4, 1887.— . . . Nothing will induce me to consent to a Parliament in Dublin with an executive dependent on it. On the other hand, Mr. G. can hardly be expected to proclaim that he has entirely abandoned what he has declared to be a cardinal principle. But the Conference will show:

1st, whether we can agree on other branches of the Irish question, viz. the land and local government; 2nd, whether there is any *tertium quid*—any alternative on which we can also agree as good in itself without requiring from either side any formal repudiation of previously expressed opinions. . . .

If further evidence is needed to rivet the proof, it will be found in a letter sent to an American acquaintance and published in *The Times*:

January 18, 1887.—The cardinal distinction between Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy and mine was to be found in the fact that he sought to give national Home Rule while I was not prepared to go further than what I may call provincial Home Rule. . . . The national idea as distinguished from the provincial is essentially separatist. Once grant that Ireland is entitled to be considered as a nation, and not as a part of a nation or a State within a nation, and you must follow this out to its logical con-

clusion and give them all the rights of a nation, including separate taxation, foreign relations and military forces.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

In short, Chamberlain never shifted one foot or the other. Morley and the Irish Nationalists were right in their judgment from the first, that the Radical Unionist did not mean to go beyond provincial self-government as in Quebec or Ontario, and that he stood more stiffly than ever for the separate treatment of Ulster. Gladstone, with no faintest thought of changing his own conception of a settlement with Irish nationalism, was willing to explore the Birmingham mind. Chamberlain's own idea in the hectic days following Randolph Churchill's resignation was to check and bar Tory reaction; to secure Liberal reunion for a resumed programme of social reform in Great Britain, with sweeping agrarian reform in Ireland; while limiting political concession in that quarter to "local self-government" through two provincial legislatures subordinate to the Unionist principle. Entirely convinced that Gladstonian Home Rule, whatever anyone might think of the merits, was impossible for years, he thought it just conceivable—he put it no higher after his first sanguine impulses at Christmas—that the Liberal bulk might think it worth while to settle with him and to obtain as much as conditions permitted.

IX

The Round Table thus inaugurated was an un-Arthurian incident and needs no long account. The Conference proper held only three sittings—two in mid-January 1887, one in mid-February. Then a mine was sprung, but without it the failure would have been the same. There never was any approach to agreement on Irish principles, never the shadow of prospect for Liberal reunion. The interest and importance of the transaction lie in the personal reactions it created. It led up to Chamberlain's final severance from his old party, after a lingering phase, when his mood of self-conflict was aggressive towards the former object of his affections, yet slow to say "Farewell" once for all.

Different versions of the Round Table Conference are like *The Ring and the Book*. The Radical Unionist's own account is given here from his memoranda written at the time. The first meetings

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

were at Harcourt's house in Grafton Street on January 13 and 14, 1887. The third and last meeting was a month later at Sir George Trevelyan's house.

CHAMBERLAIN'S MEMORANDA OF THE ROUND TABLE
CONFERENCE (1887)

(1)

January 13.— . . . Agreed that entire secrecy to be observed and if no agreement come to the whole conversations to be treated as *non avenues*. . . . J. C. read and explained suggestions for land scheme. . . . J. Morley argued that an Irish Parliament, or Irish central authority, could alone compel fulfilment of obligation. J. C. argued that more control was exercisable over a subordinate local body than over an Irish Parliament, and urged that Land Scheme was independent of question of Home Rule. . . . Agreed to treat scheme as affording fair basis for further discussion and meanwhile copy to be circulated.

Harcourt then raised question of Irish legislative authority, and asked if J. C. still adhered to his views about Canadian Constitution expressed in House of Commons. J. C. replied in affirmative, and said that Canada Act, 1867, was very suggestive basis of discussion. . . . Not a word was said about a Parliament in Dublin and an executive dependent on it.

(2)

January 14.—The discussion was founded on the terms of the Act constituting the Federal Constitution of Canada. Agreed generally that the Imperial Parliament must have similar authority over local legislature to that possessed by Dominion Parliament. . . . Agreed that powers of provincial legislation must be specifically enumerated. . . . Agreed that provincial legislature must have some kind of executive to carry out its work. . . . But question raised as to police. . . . Generally admitted that Imperial Government should have some civil force for executing authority of Imperial Parliament and decrees of any Court. . . . Agreed that except for military and naval administration and for Imperial Police, no necessity for independent Imperial administration in Ireland.

Question raised as to separate treatment of Ulster or part of Ulster. J. C. declared this to be fundamental. Herschell suggested separation of Irish business and delegations to meet in Dublin for matters in which all Ireland interested. It was suggested that some power should be given

to Ulster or to some part of Ulster to join the Southern legislature if desired. There might, for instance, be a plebiscite of counties to decide whether they would belong to Northern or Southern provinces. This plebiscite might be taken either now or at the expiry of a fixed time.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
ÆT. 50.

Questions raised as to extent of future Irish representation at Westminster. Harcourt in favour of allowing them to vote on all subjects, but all others agreed this would be impossible. Morley still desired to exclude them altogether.

With the exception of the question of separate treatment of Ulster, on which Morley desired to consult with others, all the questions raised were dealt with as matters of detail to be determined by further discussion and which did not raise questions of fundamental principle.

(3)

February 14.—At Sir G. Trevelyan's. After dinner, Harcourt asked for explanation on certain points of J. C.'s land scheme. These were discussed, but no objection was taken on principle to any point in the scheme.

The Home Rule question was then discussed with special reference to Ulster and the administration of justice.

J. C. represented that separate treatment of Ulster was fundamental. Harcourt and Morley said there was great difficulty, as Parnell objected—1st, that it would destroy the chance of giving full satisfaction to the idea of nationality, and, 2nd, that it would interfere seriously with the financial position of the Dublin authority.

As regards Law and Order, J. Morley proposed as compromise that the Crown should have veto for ten years on the nomination of judges. J. C. declined to accept this proposal.¹

With exception of J. C., the Conference agreed that the Lord Lieutenant or some similar official must continue to represent Executive authority of Crown.

It was then agreed that Morley and Herschell should further consider land scheme with special object of answering the questions reserved in J. C.'s draft.

And that Harcourt should prepare draft of Home Rule scheme on Canadian basis, leaving as reserved questions the points on which no agreement had been as yet arrived at.

¹ Chamberlain's stipulation was that all Irish judges should be nominated and paid by the Imperial Government.

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

Here, in fact, was a scheme proposing the signal victory of Chamberlain over both Gladstone and Parnell. Irish Nationalists would sweep it out of consideration. Unthinkable was Gladstone's acceptance. It would pillory him for unpardonable misjudgment a year before. Chamberlain proposed two provincial Assemblies in Ireland instead of one national legislature. The Imperial Parliament was to rule over the whole United Kingdom; as the Dominion Parliament over Canada or Congress and President at Washington over the United States. Morley said that if the Conference decided upon the full maintenance of Irish representation at Westminster he would yield, but probably might feel compelled to retire from public life.

These questions were weighty enough. They give no sense of the suppressed tension of the Conference. Under its civil surface the inward hostility between two of the delegates was implacable. From the first discussions a poisoned friendship was a bane. It is not hard to understand what happened to Morley's psychology within the week after his full-hearted letter, at Christmas-time. He was startled by Chamberlain's new move and dreaded it. His name had been pointedly omitted from the Radical Unionist's original mention to Harcourt of Gladstonian politicians suited to take seats at a Round Table because they had not embittered controversy. But Morley was just as bad, or worse. From the first he suggested that Chamberlain was "foxing".¹

On the last day of the old year the two had come face to face in Harcourt's house for the first time since Chamberlain's unlucky letter to Labouchere in May. It was an awkward meeting. They drove away in a cab together. Chamberlain asked Morley to go with him that night to Irving's box at the Lyceum, and said, "Hang public opinion! Why should we not be seen together?"² Morley fought shy. His uncomfortableness was extreme. He would do nothing to restrain Labouchere's virulence against Chamberlain. As much the more suspicious this time as the other had been high-handed during their first conflicts, Morley, of all men, again, and madly, under-estimated his old friend and leader. He wrote just after the second meeting at the Round Table:

¹ Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. ii. p. 19.

² *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 24.

He has found out that his egotism, irascibility, perversity, have landed him in a vile mess. These noble qualities are only scotched, not killed. He has proved himself to have no wisdom and no temper. Let me never more be asked to believe in his statesmanship. *C'est fini*. . . .¹

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

Chamberlain never knew of this letter, but his apprehension was wakeful. He felt certain that Morley at this phase was, in the political sense, an intense enemy, and he knew himself to be about thrice as formidable as his old comrade supposed. His imprudence in entering upon these negotiations belonged to his ready excess of daring. With astonishment he realised that most men on both sides supposed him to have entered into a weak position because of a conscious weakness within himself. The Nationalists loaded him with contumely. They declared that they would wait twenty years for a national measure rather than accept a Birmingham brand of "provincial" Home Rule. Most Liberals said and wrote that on the point of surrender he was bargaining for pardon.

Extreme Gladstonians seemed more disposed to kill the prodigal than the calf. Unionists, both Conservative and Liberal, were full of murmurs and suspicion. Generally his personal position was becoming intolerable. His tenacious reservations in the Conference were unknown to public opinion. In all parties ordinary men, as far astray as possible, surmised that the Radical Unionist was ambiguous, flinching, suing for terms.

X

In this quandary Chamberlain perforce had to undertake the unenviable task of fighting against misunderstandings outside the Conference while working for some kind of understanding within it.

At Hawick on January 22 he spoke in excellent vein, keeping within measure when attacking the Irish members who were drenching him with vitriol. He expressed his hope that some modified scheme of "Home Rule without Separation" might be

¹ Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. ii. p. 29.—Harcourt replied: "To my mind the least hopeful part of our business consists in your incurable inveteracy against J. C. I believe it to be unjust, but I despair of the task of convincing you of it."

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87. a means to Liberal reunion. "I do not dismiss as absolutely impossible the hypothesis that the time may shortly come when we shall all be once again a happy family."

But just a week later he addressed his own constituents in a far different style, and defied the Gladstonians, who hinted everywhere that he was creeping towards capitulation. The local circumstances in Birmingham were very uneasy and strained. This meeting had been postponed for several weeks. His own people did not know what he meant. It was necessary for him to end the suggestions of ambiguity. Instead of hoisting a white flag he poured volleys into the Gladstonian and Irish ranks. British reforms "must not and shall not be indefinitely postponed". Liberal reconciliation was possible, but only on the lines of definite concession to the dissentients. "The Unionist Liberals have taken their course with a full knowledge of the sacrifices which it might involve; they have staked their seats and they have staked their political fortunes; ay, and we will stake them again in the defence of what we have believed to be the supreme interests of the nation."¹

He went on to refer to a serious development. Lord Salisbury's Government had just announced two intentions—the strengthening of procedure to cope with parliamentary obstruction in the House of Commons; and the renewal of coercion in Ireland. Chamberlain cleared up his position again by taking the offensive on both wings. He would not shrink from reinforcing law against Irish disorder. But if this course were not accompanied by remedial measures in a Liberal spirit—if, instead, Conservative policy were to prove "reactionary or totally inadequate"—"the Government must take the responsibility of breaking up the Unionist party, for they know perfectly well that they cannot expect, and have not obtained, any pledge of unconditional support from any Liberal".

Ominous, no doubt, for the Round Table was this rather harsh warning. It was represented as gross and gratuitous aggression. Not quite so. We must remember what was going on behind the scenes—the oblique vendetta between former friends. Before this speech with its supposed outrageous provocation Morley's sentiments were just as inimical as afterwards. All Gladstonians, at

¹ Speech to his constituents, Birmingham Town Hall, January 29, 1887.

the moment, were in high spirits. The next Chancellor of the Exchequer in succession to Lord Randolph was the arch-Whig —in Chamberlain's eyes—Goschen. A seat had to be found for him, but in a hard-fought by-election at Liverpool he was beaten by seven votes. This was humiliation for Unionism. Morley cried prematurely to Harcourt that as for Chamberlain "You have let him out of the trap just in time; if he had not had a helping hand from you he would not have got out of it after Liverpool".¹ Uncertain whether "the trap" here means the Conference itself or Chamberlain's situation before. Gladstone was as much alienated by the Birmingham speech as he had been attracted by the one at Hawick a week earlier.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

Morley, retorting at Newcastle on February 9, suggested that the Radical Unionist's repudiation of surrender lacked good taste and good feeling. At the same time a journal in the Tyneside constituency published from day to day taunting comments which, as was thought at Highbury, and not only there, Morley must have inspired.² Chamberlain's fixed rule was never to take any blow without retaliation. Bodefully he mutters to Harcourt:

February 10, 1887.—You will not be surprised to hear that the tone of Morley's speech at Newcastle is personally most offensive to me. . . . I shall say no more on the subject either to you or to him, although I reserve my right to make a full public reply at the first convenient opportunity.

We may well wonder why the Round Table resumed at all after a month's cessation.

None the less, it held a third and last meeting on St. Valentine's Day, of all days. The sitting was at Trevelyan's house.³ Chamberlain's face was hard towards Morley and meant reprisals.

The "first convenient opportunity" for reprisals came at once,

¹ Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. ii. p. 30.

² Morley repudiated this: "The letter in the *Newcastle Leader* every day is by Mr. Stead. You might as well suspect me of inspiring the north-east wind. I have no more to do with inspiring his letter or with anything that appears in it than you have. I have nothing whatever to do with a word or an idea in a single line of the

Leader. Nor have I had. I did not know that Stead was writing until quite recently. Pray, let this at any rate drop out of your mind" (March 7, 1887).

³ We have seen from Chamberlain's "Memorandum" of this sitting that there was no possibility of a bridge between his proposals and the ideas essential to the Gladstone-Parnell alliance.

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

and in an odd manner. The editor of the *Baptist* newspaper called the attention of Highbury to a public letter by Mr. Gladstone laying on Liberal Unionists the whole blame for postponing Liberal legislation and especially Welsh Disestablishment. This latter imputation, as it happened, touched the Radical Unionist on the raw, for Gladstone had done all he could to retard Welsh Disestablishment, and in his Cabinet a year before he had vetoed Chamberlain's intention while a Minister to vote for it. The Nonconformist editor invited a reply, and it came like the simoom.

Chamberlain's letter, published in the *Baptist* on February 25, was a hot, raging blast. That whirlwind of unloosed wrath overturned the Round Table and scattered the delegates.

If, said the manifesto, the Welsh constituencies supported Mr. Gladstone's view, that Ireland blocked the way, then they had none but themselves to thank for the delay of disestablishment:

Whether the process occupies a generation or a century, "poor little Wales" must wait until Mr. Parnell is satisfied and Mr. Gladstone's policy adopted. They will not wait alone. The crofters of Scotland and the agricultural labourers of England will keep them company. Thirty-two millions of people must go without much-needed legislation because three million are disloyal. . . . So long as the majority of the Liberal party is committed to proposals which a large section of Liberals and Radicals firmly believe to be dangerous to the best interests of the United Kingdom, unjust to the minority of the Irish people, and certain to end in the disruption of the Empire, so long the party will remain shattered and impotent and all reform will be indefinitely postponed.

Upon Liberal reunion or not depended, said Chamberlain further, much more than the Irish Question:

Some of the former Leaders of the Liberal party are now engaged in this necessary work of reconciliation. They require, and they ought to have, the support and sympathy of all who desire that remedial legislation should be at once resumed. The issue of the Round Table Conference will decide much more than the Irish question. It will decide the immediate future of the Liberal party and whether or no all Liberal reform is to be indefinitely adjourned.

The letter in the *Baptist* was reprinted by every newspaper.

The press everywhere put the bellows to its leading articles. The Gladstonians had every interest in terminating the Conference upon the plea of flagrant provocation. They could not have gone further without saying where they stood with regard to Ulster and all the "consequential amendments". That would have played into the Radical Unionist's hands. It was the last thing Gladstone desired. For him it was the old, dreary, hopeless dilemma. He could not win the Radical Unionist without losing the Irish party.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

For opposite reasons, it was Chamberlain who wanted to go on with the Conference in spite of his letter. But for some weeks his chief care had been to prevent his communications from being cut behind him. To cover these he had to "take the offensive", as humorists remarked. None the less, his militant outbreak was incompatible with diplomacy. The Liberals could not have resumed without abasement. They had a flaming chance for retaliation.

XI

Harcourt had brought more kindly feeling to the discussions than anyone else, but now he had to say, more in sorrow than anger, that the hapless symposium must be intermitted. After some vague notions about resuming if Hartington would consent to join—they might as easily have brought down the man in the moon—the Round Table was relegated to the lumber-room. Gladstone decreed suspension of the Conference, and it soon died of inanition. We may take it for certain that Morley least regretted this decease and Harcourt most.

One other circumstance must be noted. On the very day when the *Baptist* letter exploded, Gladstone, returning to town, received the reports of his lieutenants upon the state of the Conference. He drew up a memorandum, which might assist our judgment of these transactions. Withheld in spite of Chamberlain's repeated requests for disclosure, it has never seen the light. With exemplary good nature Harcourt returned to soothing language; he assured Highbury that the Conference was not dead, but sleeping, though no date for resurrection could he name. Chamberlain broke off the make-believe:

BOOK
VIII.
1886-87.

. . . I feel that it is useless to continue our present correspondence. I gather clearly from your last letter that you do not look to the Conference for any further results in the direction of the reunion of the Party. The reasons you give appear of so little weight . . . that I am forced to the conclusion that you have other and stronger grounds for declining to come to an issue on the points raised or to communicate to me the memorandum prepared by Mr. Gladstone with that object. . . .¹

This, in early spring 1887, was the end of the queer parley under arms that Lord Randolph's fall before Christmas began. "All hope of reunion was at last abandoned."²

Sir George Trevelyan went over to the Gladstonian camp, leaving Chamberlain still more alone and so with his teeth more set. Public wrangling about the Round Table broke out and was sporadic for years. We need not notice it. To-day the personal recriminations on that subject seem a trouble of gnats.

On the other hand, the differences of principle were profoundly real. Chamberlain advocated complete land purchase in connection with a provincial legislature or legislatures in Ireland on the Quebec-Ontario model, as opposed to what we have since learned to call Dominion status. There is a whole world's difference. He insisted throughout on separate treatment for Ulster, such as in our day has been conceded as the alternative to civil war. Equally he stipulated that Irish representatives should attend at Westminster for common affairs as the representatives of Quebec go to Ottawa or those of Pennsylvania to Washington. The Round Table Conference in any case was bound to break down on Ulster as the Buckingham Palace Conference broke down many a year afterwards. Liberal reunion meant Liberal rupture with Parnell and his party.

The Irish Nationalists were a chief regard in Mr. Gladstone's idealism and strategy. For one thing he manœuvred with veteran skill when he suggested that Chamberlain without Hartington was not a sufficient reinforcement. For another thing, now that full conflict on coercion was impending, he felt himself more than ever bound to the Nationalists by faith and honour. Even a round table does not help you to square the circle.

¹ Chamberlain to Harcourt, March 8, 1887.

² Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

XII

There was a surprising epilogue. One night at Mrs. Jeune's dinner-table Chamberlain remarked to Lady Hayter that he would have liked to talk over the whole situation with Mr. Gladstone himself. In a day or two Lady Hayter let him know that if he made the first advances they would be kindly received.

CHAP.
XXXIV.
Æt. 50.

He made them through Lord Thring, offering to meet the pontiff's convenience at any time or place and agreeing to "absolute secrecy". Then, early in April, Mr. Gladstone assured his lost lieutenant that he was "willing and gladly willing" for full private conversation, including the new and grave subjects of Coercion and Closure.¹ In his response, gently phrased, the Radical Unionist put it that the Round Table Conference ought to have been continued up to the point of report one way or the other:

I must frankly say that the unfortunate delay which has interfered at a critical stage has created the most serious obstacles to immediate co-operation and has tended to harden and widen the differences which we all deplore.²

On Tuesday, April 5, Chamberlain drove over to Dollis Hill to converse with his old leader. They first talked of the Closure and agreed that the new rules ought not to compromise the Speaker. In the same sympathy they passed on to Irish land. Then they came with much less success to what was the chief point in the visitor's mind.³

CHAMBERLAIN AND GLADSTONE

He [Mr. Gladstone] did not believe that Lord Hartington could be brought to agree to anything which Mr. Parnell would accept. . . . He was not inclined to cry over spilt milk. Coercion having now intervened, it filled all the space, and nothing else could profitably be considered.

I asked if I was to understand that the question of Coercion must be fought out in the House and the country, before it could be profitable to make any further attempts at agreement on the main question of the government of Ireland. He said he should like forty-eight hours'

¹ Gladstone to Chamberlain, April 4, 1887.
3, 1887.

² Chamberlain's account dated the same day, April 5, 1887.

³ Chamberlain to Gladstone, April same day, April 5, 1887.

BOOK
VIII.

1886-87

reflection before answering positively, but that was his present impression, and he supposed it was also mine.

I said I found that the delay interposed at a critical moment had brought us to this position, and I pointed out that the inevitable result must be to widen the breach, and permanently to weaken the Liberal party.

He then urged that we should bring out our own plan of Local Government and said that although he did not think a Conference could settle such a plan, it might be accepted by himself and his friends, if proposed by us, as the best obtainable under the circumstances.

I asked him if he did not think that any plan proposed by me would be instantly denounced by Parnell who would thus be publicly pledged against it and could not subsequently accept it even from the hands of Mr. Gladstone himself.

Mr. G. said he did not suggest that I should put forward a plan, but that the Liberal Unionist party as a whole should do so.

I said that I did not think this was possible.

The end of the memorandum sums up:

The general impression left on my mind by the interview was that Mr. G. confidently counts on the unpopularity of coercion to bring about an early appeal to the country and to secure a decision in his favour, and that under these circumstances he does not desire to proceed further in the direction of conciliation and does not believe that the Party would allow him to do so.

This interview is remarkable on one account. For over twelve months Gladstone and his Radical opponent had not met for private conversation on politics. Possibilities of Liberal reunion were not to be discussed between them ever again. Neither knew this. "The hour had struck though I heard not the bell."

CHAPTER XXXV

TUMULT AND TRANSITION

(1887)

THE Outer and the Inner Man—A Furious Year—"Coercion but Redress"—The Constructive Ishmael—"Tomahawk and Scalping-Knife"—A Joyless Battle—Trouble in Birmingham—Is Unionism a Failure?—Last Suggestions of Liberal Reconciliation—Chamberlain's Pessimism and Thoughts of Long Retirement—Unionist Danger and Lord Salisbury's Coup—The Washington Mission accepted—The Political Future—Public Challenges but Private Warnings

I

THAT morning at Dollis Hill was Chamberlain's new "turning-point"—not the moment, weeks later, when he used the words. Since the Home Rule controversy came in sight other occasions had been turning-points, but into ways not so divergent as to forbid rejoining. Now main roads parted. Not for his nature was the fate of Lot's wife; he would not look back. But how did he look forward? Not with hope or satisfaction, but with bitterness and gloom. The old pleasure in existence was gone. It seemed a drab outlook. His own followers in Birmingham were torn by doubts not felt before, and ceased for a while to be a happy family. Unswerving as he would be—successful as yet he might be—in resisting the purposes of others, what prospect could he have of ever achieving his own?

In short, for the Radical Unionist the question became whether he should not retire altogether from politics and Parliament; or at least leave the country for a long time and betake himself to the furthest parts of the world. Strange as that possibility seems to us now—we can almost as well imagine Gladstone going to Australia—it came near. Liberals who liked the

CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 50.

BOOK
VIII.
1887.

collapse of the Round Table might well think themselves shrewd when they imagined that coercion in Ireland would make Chamberlain's position unbearable. Why try to make terms with him, when he seemed certain to be hopelessly "cornered" by events, as some said, or "trapped", as others said?

Through Queen Victoria's jubilee year the Irish Question raged with sinister fury in both islands. The months between early spring and autumn were the most difficult part of his career. Aggressively as he bore himself in the open under a sense of odious necessity, he was nigh black despair just before his whole life, public and private, was changed and lit up again by an intervention the most unexpected in the world.

Throughout this miserable phase he showed no sign of inward trial, but deliberately accentuated every outward trait of confidence. This was very characteristic. We know how coolly he could manage his public appearances when suffering physical pain. So he made it a rule never to confess political misgiving, except to the intimate few. Whenever his political position was in fact weakened, as sometimes happens to every active statesman, he attacked. So, again, in his social intercourse from the beginning of the Home Rule troubles onwards, his demeanour suggested to his admirers imperious energy and to his opponents, like Morley, aggressive domination.

Just before the third and last meeting of the Round Table, he dined with friends in London. The daughter of the house¹ sat beside him and left an animated record. It was a large party. Mr. Phelps, the American Ambassador, was there, with Rustem Pasha, the Turkish Ambassador, Mr. Buckle, the editor of *The Times*, and other notable persons. As for the Radical Unionist—or Reunionist, as we may better name him at that hour—

He charms you-by his frankness and clear-sightedness, for he knows what he can do and means to do, and as his game is to be a great one and for a great end, he speaks of himself, as I may almost say, "historically". . . . If there is no humility about Mr. Chamberlain, there is no arrogant assumption. . . . If I feel that a becoming diffidence is rather *wanting*, this is made up for by what seems calm prescience and consequent decision, marking him as a man who *must* win in the long run.

¹ Lady Stanley's Diary, February 5, 1887.

Chamberlain remarks that no great statesman any more than a great surgeon should continue in action at Gladstone's age. Better even for Palmerston to have retired before he did.

CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 50.

Of course, I shall be Premier, there is nothing more certain. I will rebuild the fortress. . . . We shall not have Home Rule. We shall have improved government in Ireland . . . great reforms throughout Great Britain and Ireland, but it shall never come to granting Home Rule.

All this mixed with unbridled derision of the Liberal Home Rulers and their hurried conversion by their wizard.

Friend and foe alike noticed that he talked of nothing but politics. On this evening, by partial exception, he also talked about wealth—the little pleasure he derived from money.

I think the only expensive taste that I would like more lavishly to indulge in is orchids, but as for fine houses, carriages, etc., I do not care for or desire any of these things. I am not really a rich man. I might have been if I had stuck to my business and left politics alone, but I find so little pleasure in mere money-making and in what wealth affords that business offered me but little inducement to continue in it.

The diary adds that he “spoke with convincing sincerity. No one can possibly talk to Mr. Chamberlain without being impressed and attracted by his directness and earnestness.” His young listener could not know that he was describing what had been his dream rather than what was now his expectation. On platforms just as at dinner tables he kept up the same unhesitating tone of militant vigour, while his real estimate of his own future grew more and more pessimistic. To say that he maintained a will of iron for combat, even when sick at heart, is no abuse of literary paradox. It is the essence of the man at this period.

II

There had been somewhat ennobling for all sides in the first phase of the Home Rule controversy, so true and strong was the intellectual conflict. But in 1887 passion came to the top and with it all the sediment. Public life was inflamed and nearly all men's judgments of their opponents were fiercely distorted. Chamberlain was disfigured like the rest. The more savagely he

BOOK
VIII.
1887.

was assailed the more merciless were his attacks. Agrarian guerilla and evictions; struggles in Parliament and in jails; measureless vilification of each other by the parties; ridiculous affairs, fatal incidents, forged letters—all these turned politics into a melodrama now almost unbelievable. In Ireland the Plan of Campaign, with its watchword of "Reductions or no Rent", sought to suspend all law for landlords. Withheld rents were pooled to make a fighting fund. On any view of Ireland's future it was a dangerous precedent, but Gladstone in his enthusiasm blessed what Parnell disapproved.

In Parliament, remarkable were the changes that met the Radical Unionist's unwelcoming eye when he looked across the floor to the Treasury Bench. Lord Randolph was no longer its central and mercurial figure. By utter contrast, Mr. W. H. Smith sat there as a prosaic and successful Leader of the House. Mr. Goschen, "the skeleton at the feast", sat beside him as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

They were joined presently by a new man who will count for much indeed through all the rest of this book. Lord Salisbury appointed Chief Secretary his own nephew, Arthur Balfour, who, as yet hardly known to the country, rapidly became one of its first men. The astonished Irish party found him the nimblest yet firmest Chief Secretary they had encountered—fearless, rapier-witted. He now introduced the most formidable of Coercion Bills, unlimited in duration—"perpetual coercion", as it was called—and he enforced the law with an inexorable serenity. After some hesitant beginnings, owing to inexperience, not in the least to lack of innate nerve, he was soon hailed by his party with pride and delight as that sort of "silken aristocrat with a heart of steel" whom the *Spectator* recently had advocated as the ideal type for Ireland and Unionism.

A word on two other aspects is required before we can realise from Chamberlain's point of view the new conditions with which he had to reckon and cope. The Gladstonians, like their leader, regarded coercion with mingled feelings of moral abhorrence and political joy. They justly expected that this ugly alternative to Home Rule would bring back flocks of doubting electors to the true fold. Liberal dissentients who voted for coercion as the least evil—they included Bright—were denounced as men of

iniquity with whom no further communication could be held. Unionists retorted, with no less violence of conviction, that Gladstone and his followers were now shameless agitators, who had thrown aside all principle and decency to become apologists for outrage, murder and anarchy. CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 50.

Who then capable of reading *The Times* can forget the astounding day, April 18, when that newspaper, just before the decisive division on the Coercion Bill, published what purported to be the facsimile of a letter in Parnell's handwriting? The letter grovelled to the instigators of the Phoenix Park murders and condoned the assassinations. With this episode we shall have to deal much more closely in a later chapter and in another connection. With a frenzy of rival prejudices the struggle went on for months; while the Radical Unionist—belligerent and constructive by turns—wondered how long he could continue to take part in public life.

III

What was Chamberlain's predicament? Ruthlessly defending the Crimes Bill as an inescapable necessity if the Union were not to be overthrown by force, yet embarrassing the Government by his demands for bolder remedial measures, he appeared in Conservative eyes an embodied contradiction.

At the beginning of the Session of 1887 the Radical Unionist confirmed in its full significance the verdict of the General Election by voting with Hartington and Bright for the Government on the Address. Above all things at this moment he desired that the Conservative Government should introduce a great and final measure transferring the ownership of Irish land to the tenants. He thought the good results of such a measure would bring about local government in Ireland to the extent of Provincial Councils at least. His first marked intervention in debate was on March 24. He stood up to support the motion of urgency for coercion. The support was given on terms. He quoted satirically from a passage written formerly by John Morley—"every Government, exactly because it is a Government, is bound to do its utmost to restore order temporarily, even while it is removing the more permanent causes which have made disorder natural and justifiable". Not much in this *tu quoque*, as

BOOK

VIII.

1887.

Chamberlain well knew, unless he could himself advocate the ameliorating as well as the repressive implication. This he did. To the exceeding discomfort of most Conservatives, Chamberlain urged as one remedial measure that rents in Ireland should be reduced in accordance with the fall in prices. "If there is one scandal worse than another at the present time, it is evictions for the enforcement of unjust rents." His main argument was of another kind. It came to this, that while he neither liked nor trusted a Conservative Government any more than he ever had, he would not lift a finger to displace it—he would make its preservation paramount—so long as Gladstone's unchanged Home Rule policy and Nationalist domination were the alternatives.

He had no qualms on June 10 and June 17, when the Government carried, and the Chairman applied, the historic motion to bring the weeks of debate on the Crimes Bill to an end. At the appointed hour all the clauses not already disposed of in Committee were added at a sweep to the Bill. All the members of the Opposition stalked out of the House, and protested for a time that freedom shrieked as when Kosciusko fell. No one now laments the old procedure, or confuses the cause of liberty with that of loquacity—were it even the higher loquacity. For general reasons, Chamberlain always had been in favour of making the House of Commons a more expeditious mechanism. Ever since the elections of 1885 he had preferred any powers of closure, however trenchant, to the control of the House of Commons by the Irish minority.

Ready for a long while past to believe the worst of Parnell and his men—confirmed in this bias by his intercourse with O'Shea—he believed like Bright that *The Times*' charges against the Irish party were substantially true; and that even the forged letter looked authentic on the face of it. Chamberlain's speeches this year—his "tomahawk and scalping-knife" speeches—were derived mainly from *The Times* articles on "Parnellism and Crime".

As the Parnellites had begun the attempt to overpower him with abuse, he was resolved, without truce or mercy, so far as they were concerned, to arouse an English feeling that would bear them down. Selecting the most hideous incidents of out-

rage, he inferred that they were typical. When he declaimed at Birmingham on June 1, he had been exceptionally exasperated by another attack just made by John Morley on the Liberal Unionists, but indirectly on Chamberlain himself. He was misled into using a phrase equally cheered by his audience and jeered by his antagonists: "We shall be taunted, I suppose, with an alliance with the Tories. At least our allies will be English gentlemen and not the subsidised agents of a foreign conspiracy."

CHAP.
XXXV.
ÆT. 50.

Through his different utterances on these lines in the House of Commons and throughout the country, from the Midlands and London to the Scottish Highlands and Ulster, we must not try to follow him. No one can attempt to summarise the speeches of rival statesmen at that time—including Gladstone—without compiling an interminable repertory of damnable iterations. What is unendurably tedious now, was then exciting and inflammatory for hearers and readers. Chamberlain is always ingenious in restatement, full of new illustrations and explosive phrases. But for him, as for them all, it is the theme with variations. One side proclaimed "The Union and the Empire"; the other "Home Rule and Union of Hearts". Not a case where assured truth was then ascertainable, but—as usual in the most vexed human affairs—a battle between conflicting ideals and imaginations, loyalties and prejudices, prophecies and beliefs.

IV

At heart, Chamberlain's triumphs of invective on the platform gave him no complacent satisfaction. He took every chance to assert himself as Radical reformer no less than Unionist. When he first spoke in the House of Commons for coercion he insisted upon far-going steps to stay evictions and to deal with the fall in prices which had made rents unfair. A few days later he writes to the Chief Secretary concerning the proposed Land Bill, and presses Lord Salisbury's Government to go much further:

TO A. J. BALFOUR

Confidential.—March 30, 1887.—It is now 1 A.M. and I have not much time to consider your draft.

BOOK
VIII.

1887.

In your attempt to placate the House of Lords and the landlords, you are running the greatest risk of defeat in the House of Commons and the country. The provisions are, I think, quite inadequate, and if they are published in their present form I do not believe you will get your Coercion Bill through the Commons.

Everything is guarded in the interest of the creditors, and the qualifications and conditions are so numerous that no one will be able to read into them anything to the efficient protection of the tenants. The Coercion Bill will strengthen the position of the landlords. They ought to be satisfied with it. This remedial Bill should bear on its face that it is designed to protect the tenant against the alleged injustice of bad landlords, and thus to prevent the Coercion Bill from being a mere instrument for enabling such rents to be collected. . . .

I am seriously alarmed at the prospect, if you are unable to make a more Liberal show, and I am sure that I shall not be able to keep my section of the Liberal Unionists in heart on such thin porridge. I wish I could induce you to deal boldly with the crisis. The House of Lords would be simply mad to reject any remedial measure proposed by the Government at such a time. If they amended it, you at any rate would be clear, and would be able to appeal to the House of Commons and set things straight.

The Gladstonians are preparing for a great campaign in the country on Coercion, and they will carry many with them. You will simply give the game into their hands unless you can point to your land legislation as a complete answer to the charge that you only want additional powers to collect unfair rents. Believe me, if you hang back now, the game of law and order is indeed up.

March 31, 1887.— . . . Believe me, much depends on *appearance*. Your Bill is made to appear to be in the interest of the landlord and the creditors. What we want broadly is that no tenant shall be evicted and deprived of his property on the ground of inability or unwillingness to pay an unjust rent, and we want the Court to say in every case whether the rent is under the circumstances unjust. Suppose a debtor pursued by a usurer for arrears of exorbitant interest. Would it be enough to say that pursuit might be stayed by the Court if delay would enable the debtor to pay the debt—or that a composition might be arranged if the inability of debtor were due to the act of God? We want an order by the Court to settle what is just and right under *all* the circumstances of the case.

I have just seen Lord Castletown and have spoken to him broadly in above sense. He entirely concurs and will see Goschen on the subject, and he is a Tory Irish landlord.

CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 50.

Unless you cut the ground from under the feet of the agitators and Plan of Campaign, and accomplish by law the protection of tenants against injustice which they endeavour to secure by robbing and outrage, you will have the country against you. I am sure my instinct is right in this matter.

In a word, he was convinced that Conservative bias in the interests of Irish landlords would reinforce Home Rule arguments, sap the Union, and weaken especially Liberal Unionists in the constituencies. The blindness of the Cabinet to the dire need for remedial legislation parallel with coercion made him almost hopeless of being able to hold his own ground. They were making coercion appear a class instrument, a privilege of property, not that necessity of social defence which he regarded as its justification.

For the Unionist alliance a crisis ensued. Its internal severity was far more dangerous than was indicated by the busy surmises of the day. After the slow passage of the Irish Land Bill through the House of Lords, its Second Reading was moved in the House of Commons by the Chief Secretary on July 11. Mr. Balfour still declared that the Government was opposed to any interference with judicial rents. Chamberlain, in friendly and guarded words, welcomed the Bill as inspired by honest and generous intentions; but then he made a reservation, and it was evidently grave.

If the legislation of 1881 had failed, said the Radical Unionist, the fall of prices was the cause of the failure. He did not ask for a revision of all rents legally fixed on assumptions which had collapsed, but he pressed for the relief of tenants whose landlords had made no reductions. Typical of other information received, he had in mind the opinion privately communicated by his expert friend, Sir Robert Giffen—"the judicial rents cannot be paid without impoverishing the tenants in a way that may well be a danger to civilisation". He declared that in Committee he would do everything in his power to carry such amendments as would prevent "harsh, unjust and unnecessary

BOOK
VIII.
1887.

evictions".¹ Weeks before he had written to his Whig associate, "We are bound to make unjust evictions impossible".²

V

Next day there were strong rumours that Lord Salisbury would retire from the Premiership and that Unionist reconstruction under Hartington was the only solution. Salisbury was still of the opinion, declared shortly after he formed his Government, that the reduction of judicial rents would be neither honest nor expedient. Nationalists contended that these rents were iniquitous and unpayable. Our Radical Unionist wrote to Dale:

July 12, 1887.—Politics continue odious to me, and I fear the condition of things cannot be expected to improve at present. The violence of party spirit was never more intense and we had a proof of this last night in the reception given to a really generous Bill by the Gladstonian and Parnellite party. I hope the Government will persevere and accept amendments. The Liberals are entitled to expect concessions to their views. I fancy the difficulty is with Lord Salisbury. I should not be surprised at any moment to hear of his retirement and of an entire reconstruction of the Government.

For a few more days the Cabinet and the solid bulk of old Conservatives seemed to be obstinate alike. Though the heavens and prices fall, let judicial rents be upheld. Hartington, however, saw the necessity of enforcing Chamberlain's view, and after meetings at Devonshire House full Liberal Unionist pressure was applied to the Government.

Against the grain, the Prime Minister gave way. On July 19, a week after the rumours of his refusal and retirement, Salisbury addressed a meeting of the Conservative party at the Carlton Club and candidly disclosed his predicament. The Government was more or less dependent on a thorough understanding with

¹ "I shall vote for the Second Reading of the Bill. . . . I do not consider that anyone who votes for the Second Reading is thereby disposing of or prejudicing the question of a revision of rents. That is a totally different question, which will no doubt come

up on the Committee Stage of the Bill, and on which I reserve to myself absolute liberty of action." *Hansard, Third Series, vol. cccxvii. (July 11, 1887).*

² Chamberlain to Hartington, May 8, 1887.

the Liberal Unionists. Without give and take the alliance—the barrier to Home Rule—must break. Unless considerable alterations were made in the Land Bill, Ulster itself would very probably be lost to the Unionist cause. These depressing truths made the Carlton Club meeting nearly unanimous in sullen acquiescence.

CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 51.

Judicial rents were thrown open to revision. Chamberlain notes, "I took considerable part in the debates in Committee on this Bill and was instrumental in securing several amendments in a Liberal sense".¹ At the end of it he was able to say that the Conservatives had conceded "a principle more Radical than has ever been put before the House of Commons". When he had questioned the rigid sanctity of judicial rents a year before, nearly all Conservatives vowed to keep them taboo against an incorrigible demagogue. The boon to the Irish tenants was substantial. By the reduction of over 100,000 rents at an average rate of 14 per cent they were relieved to a total extent of £360,000 annually. Nationalists said this was inadequate; landlords said that it was "as bad as the Plan of Campaign".²

In lesser ways he did more than anyone to better the Bill by his activity in Committee through the summer. Overburdened by debts other than arrears of unrevised rents were many tenants. He wished these to make a fresh start in life by compounding for all their debts in cases judged by the Land Courts to be necessitous and deserving. This intention was crassly defeated by the Irish party itself in the interests of village shopkeepers and usurers. When reactionary amendments by the House of Lords were supported by Ministers he reserved his freedom to vote against the Government.³

What can we call him at this time but a "constructive Ishmael"? Early in the year, after Easter, he set out for Scotland to fight in a Radical style for his old friends the crofters and to inspire Liberal Unionism. He spent three weeks north of the Border. This picturesque and very strenuous expedition meant a good deal to him at the time, and would deserve more description in these pages had it come to anything. Unlike the splendid

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

² Clayden, *England under the Coalition*, p. 337.

³ Debates on the Lords' Amend-

ments in the House of Commons. Hansard, Third Series, vol. cccxix. (August 12 and 18, 1887).

BOOK
VIII.
1887.

pilgrimage of 1885, it was a chequered crusade—fruitless in the end so far as concerned the crofters. Unionist newspapers called it a historic tour. Accompanied by a whole corps of reporters, he ranged from Ayr to Edinburgh, thence to Inverness and Dingwall, and from the Highlands to the nearer Hebrides, Lewis and Skye, winding up at Glasgow. But the Irish Question jangled the Radical music. At Edinburgh, some who formerly had worshipped him guyed him in effigy through the streets. All the speeches—nearly a dozen principal ones and many minor—were excellent in their incisive lucidity, but they had no imaginative effect by comparison with his Scottish campaign for the “unauthorised programme” twenty months before.

His biggest and strongest meeting was the last of the series. At Glasgow he brought his audience to its feet in excitement when he challenged Parnell to go into Court against *The Times* and face cross-examination. Immediately on coming home he set to work on a Crofters’ Relief Bill and widely circulated the draft. In vain. Liberals liked it, but too much disliked him. To Conservatives and Whigs he could not look in the cause of the Scottish crofters. His proposals for remedying their stark poverty were still-born. He was paying his penalties.¹

VI

All politics remained subject to the Irish obsession, no matter what diversions might be attempted. We have seen how one internal crisis of the Unionist alliance, in July, on the Irish Land Bill, was solved in Chamberlain’s favour. But in August there was another and a worse tangle. Against the strong advice of the Liberal Unionist sections, both Whig and Radical, the Conservative Government decided to put down by proclamation the Irish National League. This was the old confusion—extending suppression of lawless acts to war upon political opinion. Opposed to this on every ground, rightly certain that it would only make the League more potent though less open, Chamberlain at once gave his Whig colleague the gravest warning: “You must please consider that I am free to take a perfectly independent

¹ The first meeting of this Scottish tour was at Ayr on April 13, 1887, the last at Glasgow, May 3.

course. I cannot in any event support the Government in what I believe to be a suicidal policy" (August 11). "Why not trust rather to the beneficent operation of the Land Bill?"

CHAP.
XXXV.
ÆT. 51.

He converted Hartington to his view. But in spite of both the Conservative Cabinet felt bound to proclaim the League. This was on August 19. Chamberlain's cup was full.

Next day the local branches of the Radical Union attended a garden party at Highbury. Their leader told them, "I am afraid that the course which the Government has pursued is one which will land them in the greatest difficulty and even danger". And added that he must support his personal opinion by his adverse vote. He made it clear to his hearers that in spite of this protest on a single point the general interests of the Union were still absolutely paramount in his judgment. He would do nothing to overthrow the Government. He did not say all he felt. For months it had been hard to hold Birmingham for coercion against the Home Rulers.

Gladstone brought forward a condemnatory motion. On August 26 it was defeated by 77. Hartington, Bright and three-fifths (47) of the Liberal Unionists voted with the Government. But over a fifth of them (17) were absent unpaired. Chamberlain and five others—Richard Chamberlain, Jesse Collings, William Kenrick, Powell Williams and Sir B. Hingley—went into the lobby with Gladstone against the suppression of the Irish National League.

In one sense it was the most fortunate vote he ever gave, for it led immediately to a sequel that transformed his life and career—the American mission and his marriage.

VII

Just before the Radical Unionist went into the lobby with his old leader there seemed a last flickering chance of Liberal re-union. For that cause the situation recalled Drayton's sonnet:

. . . When all have given him over,
From death to life, thou mightst him yet recover.

Gladstone lately seemed to show a coming-on disposition. Would he concede at last the indispensable points of May 1886—Irish representation at Westminster; Home Rule on lines

BOOK
VIII.
1887.

consistent with the federation of the United Kingdom; separate treatment for Ulster—all the visible symbols and practical guarantees of Imperial supremacy? The great patriarch of British politics knew well who had been his prevailing adversary, recognising the Radical seceder as a far more considerable person than was imagined when he was allowed to leave the Cabinet with little effort to detain him. Gladstone marked with admiration Chamberlain's courage and constructive ability on the Land Bill, and was aware of his strong feeling against the intended proclamation of the Irish National League.

True that, since the abandonment of the Round Table, Chamberlain reiterated that he would make no more advances—"Nay, I have done. You get no more from me." True that, not long since, he had proclaimed a final severance—"the turning-point of the controversy"—in answer to Morley's excommunication of all Liberal Unionists supporting coercion:

I think Mr. John Morley's speech has hardly received the attention which it deserves. It will be found hereafter to have marked the turning-point of the controversy. I will not dwell on the personal part of the speech. I suppose it cannot be avoided in a controversy of this kind that, as it proceeds, it tends to become more bitter, more irreconcilable. . . . We have to recognise the fact in all seriousness and in all sadness that we have been too sanguine in hoping for reconciliation. . . . Reflection has not softened in any way the tone or temper of our past friends—now our bitterest assailants. I am reluctantly forced to the conclusion that there is no desire for reunion on the part of the Gladstonian Liberals and that the cleavage in the ranks of the Liberal party has become complete and irretrievable.¹

But he uttered it in his wrath. Could he mean it still after the efficiency of his Liberalism had been proved through the mid-summer and the late summer of that acrid year? Chamberlain and Morley were unhappy in encounter—lunging and stabbing at each other in nearly all their speeches—recriminating past pardon it might seem, then full of regrets again when any accident threw them into the way of private intercourse.

On the evening of August 12 they had intimate talk. Of the details we know nothing except that Chamberlain threw out the

¹ Speech to the National Liberal Union, Birmingham, June 1, 1887.

“specific suggestion” that “communications as to a plan might be good”. He was not “looking back”. Could Mr. Gladstone be induced to look forward with realism? This mood persuaded Morley that another attempt at reunion ought to be made. He invited himself to Hawarden immediately. The curious sequel is something more than a footnote to history.

CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 51.

MORLEY TO CHAMBERLAIN

August 12.—I shall start this morning for H.C. [Hawarden Castle]. Suppose that I should wish to see you afterwards, there would perhaps be no objection to my appearing at Highbury to breakfast to-morrow morning? Unless I have a telegram at H.C. this afternoon, I shall assume that I may come *if* it should seem desirable. Of course, it ought to be kept strictly secret, if that be possible—I mean, out of the newspapers. You may not think it desirable under any circumstances.

I want to lose no time, because my family are off to Switzerland this morning and I want to join them as soon as may be.

August 14.—I am very sorry not to find myself at Highbury this morning, but the trains are perverse, and my people are “eating their heads off” in a Dover hotel until I join them.

I found my host in an extremely friendly frame of mind towards anything that pointed towards effective accommodation. He was pleased both at my going and at the incident which prompted my going.

For the specific suggestion that communications as to a plan might be good, he would not be disinclined, but he doubts whether the moment is yet come. That moment ought to be preceded by public declarations on our part that the course taken by you on some occasion or other has been in a remarkable degree for the common advantage and good. Such declarations might, he thinks, be justly made in connection with your line on the Irish Land Bill now before the House of Commons. He recognises your great services in the course of the transformation of that measure. Such recognition would naturally pave the way to further accommodation.

Two other considerations weigh with him.

(1) It is necessary to move gradually on account of the irritation, etc. etc., in our own party as to one whom they regard as much the most formidable of our opponents in argument and whom my host himself described as exhibiting more energy, suppleness and brains generally than “all the rest of the lot put together”.

BOOK
VIII.
1887.

(2) Would not accommodation be discussed more hopefully when events had ripened, and made it easier for you (if, after communication, you should think it desirable) to bring others of the group to the same view?

Of course, you must be aware how strong is the desire in his mind not to leave behind him a party schism for which history may hold him responsible. Therefore, he dreads any step which might in some degree commit him to what might prove only sectional accommodation.

So much for this. My own notion, after thinking over what passed, is that if on my return three weeks or a month hence, you feel inclined to reopen the matter with me, good might come of it. Events would have "ripened" possibly to a sufficient point. I think that an informal and unofficial inter-communication of this kind—which is, I take it, what you have in your own mind—would be of advantage. My address for the next fortnight, if you care to write, is Hotel Riffel Alp, Zermatt.

On consideration I thought it due to Harcourt to say to him (Mr. G.) that from the tone of our conversation, I felt that another attempt should be made and that therefore I had determined to go to H.

Of what I have called the specific suggestion I said nothing, and the responsibility of the journey was wholly mine *ab initio* and down to the end. He heartily concurred in my project you may be sure.

This meant that Morley had found the Liberal pontiff benignant but full of reservation and procrastination. He is more generous than ever before in personal praise of the man amongst the Liberal Unionists who has "more energy, suppleness and brains than 'all the rest of the lot put together' ". But, old as he is, he still wants to wait and see. Chamberlain, though younger, must take some decision before long. Courteously indisposed to enter into the kind of discussion thus invited for the last time of all, Gladstone suggests, as at Dollis Hill some months before, his inability to negotiate in earnest unless Hartington also can be brought in—a safe because unattainable condition. He expects, too, no doubt, that Chamberlain and his group, under pressure of their difficulties, must capitulate or perish; and above all, believes that in any case the flowing tide of popular opinion will bear him to triumph. For Liberalism was carrying the by-elections, and Schnadhorst had his turn.

Chamberlain answered in a tone mild for him, and even weary, but not meek: CHAP.

TO MORLEY

Æt. 51.

Hunstanton, August 16.— . . . I appreciate the friendly tone of Mr. Gladstone's conversation, and I also recognise the imperative necessity of proceeding with care and prudence. Past failures must make us all cautious, and I am therefore quite ready to accept your view and to wait till events have ripened, or at least till you return, before any further step of any kind is taken.

At the present moment I notice a certain hardening on the part of other prominent Unionists, due I think to the conviction that closer communication with the Tories is the natural outcome of the situation and is made more necessary by the result of recent elections. Nothing, however, is likely to be arranged immediately, and delay will not therefore prejudice any future friendly and unofficial discussion. . . .

This is a dull place, but I shall spend some part of the next few weeks here. I am seriously thinking of a long retirement later on, and of a visit to India or perhaps even to Australia.

He was tired of it all. He wished rather to see the Empire with his own eyes, as Dilke had seen it. When he came back, much might have changed at home. He would be free to intervene with power one way or the other.

VIII

A painful part of the truth is that he had failed, though creditably, in his endeavour to convince Hartington and Churchill of the necessity for a new departure—in the sense of a constructive Unionist policy. To rely on coercion alone he thought suicidal. Liberal Unionism would almost disappear in the constituencies; the next General Election would be a downfall. Hartington, on the very day of Morley's report from Hawarden, wrote a long, grave letter saying that to produce "a modified Home Rule scheme founded on the Canadian Constitution" would probably break up the Unionist alliance altogether; that even Churchill was of the same opinion; and that, with regret, they would both separate themselves from Chamberlain.

HARTINGTON AND CHURCHILL TO CHAMBERLAIN

BOOK
VIII.
1887.

Private.—August 15, 1887.—*Hartington.*—I met R. Churchill in the country yesterday and had a talk with him. I found that you had mentioned to him your opinion that the time had come for a new departure. . . .

I gather that he thinks that the Conservative Party would not entertain any plan going beyond a large extension of Local Government for the three Kingdoms. . . .

R. Churchill thinks, therefore, that our adoption of a modified Home Rule scheme founded on the Canadian Constitution will probably break up the alliance between the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists, and will be fatal to the prospects of a coalition or of a national party, to which he still looks forward, though he sees greater difficulties than he did in the way of any combination which would not include Lord Salisbury. I conceive that on Irish as on other political questions R. Churchill is at least as advanced as any of the Conservatives, and I conclude therefore that the prospect of any national settlement on the lines of your plan must be a very remote one, even if Mr. Gladstone were to take a favourable view of it.

The probable result of your now bringing forward your plan would then be to break up the alliance with the Conservatives and to make a reconstruction of the Government impossible. We shall either have to join Mr. Gladstone or to remain in a position where we shall have the support neither of the Liberals nor the Conservatives, which of course means our disappearance. . . . I fear that it may be, as you have suggested, the commencement of a separation in our lines of action. . . .

If this should come to pass under any circumstances I should regret it, but the difference of our positions from the outset would make such a separation perfectly intelligible on both sides.¹

August 22.—*Churchill.*—I waited to answer your letter until I had read your speech of Saturday last. I think it was a most skilful deliverance and I am most truly thankful that you postponed any exposition of alternative schemes. I do not believe that any conceivable set of circumstances could form ground for an exception to the maxim "Don't prescribe till you are called in".

Of course I am entirely at one with you as to the insensate impropriety

¹ Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. pp. 193-194.

of the Proclamation of the League. If the whole Liberal Unionist Party were going to vote against it, I should certainly have gone with them. But I do not understand that Lord H. will refuse to support the Government, and that being so, I shall give a silent vote in their favour. The conduct of the Government on the Land question and on the League question is imbecile enough, no matter what might be the consequences. Every day that they remain in office strengthens Mr. G.'s hands. But you and I can do nothing by ourselves. I think we must both stick to Lord H. *coûte que coûte*. . . . His position is most difficult, but his shrewd caution and masterly inactivity will probably carry him and his following through.

CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 51.

The old Tories have for the moment got the upper hand quite too damnably, but I like to think it is their last dying flutter. The influences against me personally are savage and ferocious, but I have much encouragement from many other quarters. I cannot help thinking that the length and labours of the session will probably kill a few of the Ministers, which would make things more simple and easy. . . .

In alarm, Liberal Unionists mediatory by nature, like Sir Henry James, entreated the unauthorised campaigner, thus threatening to break out again, to stay his hand. Failing any definite support from Gladstone, Chamberlain gave sombre consent:

TO HARTINGTON

August 16. —I am more than ever convinced that the present situation is untenable and that Mr. Gladstone is winning hand over hand. Every day brings me letters from Liberal Unionists in all parts of the country asking what the issue is and where we still differ from our old colleagues.

If we were able to come to an agreement with Mr. G., I cannot believe that the Tories would be so stupid as to refuse to consider it. But I do not expect agreement as the result of the policy I propose —I think on the contrary that it would emphasise and define the points of difference.

I am, however, very anxious that even if a disagreement between us on Irish policy must ultimately be declared, it should at least be delayed as long as possible, and therefore I will postpone any statement which might be of a compromising character.

I am afraid that we shall continue to lose elections, and unless some

BOOK

VIII.

1887.

happy chance alters the whole course of events, I expect to see Mr. G. back again in the early half of next year.

And in the meantime I am at my wit's end to know how to treat the situation in public and what to say to prevent the disappearance of our followers in the country.

Thus the Gladstonians, jubilant by instinct towards the autumn of 1887, without guessing all that was going on, had more reasons for confidence than the most sanguine amongst them knew. It was a moment of life and death for the Unionist alliance. Immediately after this correspondence, Chamberlain and Hartington met in the House of Commons and sounded the situation to the bottom. The results of this talk were one of the main influences upon the Conservative Ministry of 1886-92.

On August 20, three days later, the dreaded Member for West Birmingham addressed his Radical Unionists at Highbury. We have glanced at this occasion, but it requires further mention. While condemning the suppression of the Irish National League, he felt justified in easing the breath of anxious Ministerialists. Taking Irish policy and social policy in turn, this pronouncement, very quiet in tone for him, foreshadowed the lines on which he was to move for all the future. Refraining from announcing his alternative scheme for settling the Home Rule question, he declared that recent rumours of his leaving the Unionist party were "absolutely without a shadow of foundation". He adhered to Lord Hartington's leadership, and would support the Government's general policy so far and so long as it tended in reality to the maintenance of the Union. As for progressive legislation, the session had not been satisfactory, but there was good promise. He hailed particularly the Allotments Bill, dear to Jesse Collings. However imperfect, it applied "the blessed principle of compulsion" as a first instalment from Tory hands of the "unauthorised programme" which Gladstone had tried to sweep aside.

This speech was partly tactics, partly dead earnest. At last the Conservative administration began to see that in social policy they must concede much to this man or lose everything.

IX

When he voted with Gladstone against the proclamation of the Irish National League it was for several reasons a warning for the Government and for all the Ministerialists. The Conservative leaders did not blame him. They knew how he stood. He was in the most execrable plight. Never had he been more exasperated with Gladstonian ideology or more saturnine towards Conservative and Whig convention. A very few weeks before he would have welcomed the displacement of Lord Salisbury and the Conservative regime by Lord Hartington as the head of a National Cabinet including Lord Randolph and himself. Now, reconstruction seemed a myth and decomposition the prospect. The Liberal Unionists were damagingly exhibited as divided into three sections. Over twenty of them, including the abstainers as well as the protesters, had refused to support the Treasury Bench. This, as we saw, was on Friday, August 26. In regard to Chamberlain, the urgent question for the Government was what on earth to do with him. That he was in a mood to turn away from the scene of domestic politics and to leave the country they knew.

CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 51.

That week-end the Prime Minister acted on an idea. Whether conceived by him or conveyed to him remains uncertain. On Sunday, August 28, he telegraphed in cypher to the Queen at Balmoral proposing to send the Radical Unionist to the United States as Chief Commissioner for Britain in an effort to settle the Fishery Dispute. Her Majesty at once telegraphed back her high approval—"It is a wise measure in many ways".¹ The offer was made to Chamberlain and by him instantly accepted with relief. Of how and why he went to Washington more must be told in the next chapter. This is a very singular instance of how destiny, as often happens, may strike sideways into a man's life.

The weeks before he crossed the Atlantic were full of thoughts and shadows. His acceptance of the inevitable in the shape of final severance from the Liberal party was not joyful but grim. Why should he not go to America? He had intended to go further away, to India or even to Australia. Personal ambition was more nearly dead in him than ever before or after. He was

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. i. p. 347.

BOOK
VIII.
1887.

gloomy about most things. What friends he had left were as comfortless. Since the introduction of coercion his own city had been full of unrest. Schnadhorst again had high hopes of it. In the spring, the Two Thousand had hastened to condemn the Coercion Bill in spite of Highbury. At that blow, Chamberlain wrote to Dr. Dale:

April 25.—I have been pained and distressed by the action of the Two Thousand. I would gladly go out of politics altogether, and nothing but the sense that much responsibility rests on my shoulders keeps me from immediate resignation.

After that, even Birmingham was not quite a cheerful place for him.

His faithful lieutenants, like Collings and Powell Williams, writhed under the position from the first, and loathed it more as the frantic confusion of affairs went on through the summer of 1887. Dr. Dale was unhappy and uncertain. Narrowly avoided was the disaster of his going over openly to the Gladstonians. To Chamberlain's practised eye, the course of the by-elections showed beyond doubt that Gladstone would sweep the country unless some creative inspiration entered into Unionist policy.

After accepting the American mission, he made to his Whig associate another appeal in this sense. But Hartington still thought, on the contrary, that any programme of moderate Home Rule would only split the Unionist party from top to bottom. At last Chamberlain ceased to urge his view but emphasised his warnings:

September 22.—*To Hartington.*— . . . I decided after my last conversation with you not to put my alternative scheme forward at the present time in opposition to your wish. . . . At the same time, it is right that I should privately record my dissent from the policy which you have finally adopted. It is a negative policy, and, while it may do very well for the Conservatives, it will not retain any considerable number of Liberal or Radical Unionists in the country. Unless something unexpected turns up, we are certain to be extinguished at the next election. . . . If you are ready to support the Government through thick and thin, and whether they accept your advice or not, they may retain office for a few years, but the smash will be all the worse when it does come.¹

¹ Holland's *Duke of Devonshire*, vol. ii. p. 196.

About the same time, in this process of closing old accounts without knowing how new ledgers were to be opened, an interrupted correspondence was resumed and terminated when Morley returned from Switzerland to find that the chance of *rapprochement* was gone for good.

CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 51.

CHAMBERLAIN AND MORLEY

September 18.—Chamberlain.— . . . The situation appears to me to be more hopeless than ever. I read Mr. Gladstone's last speeches and letters as rather a withdrawal than an advance on the line of conciliation. . . . If he thinks (as he probably does, with his sanguine disposition) that the tide is flowing quickly in his favour, it is natural that he should be indisposed to make any sacrifice to bring back his former colleagues. On the other hand, I need hardly point out to you that if the existence of the Government were at stake, all of us who still entertain fears of Mr. G.'s policy and believe that it might lead to separation, would be welded together, and would undoubtedly put aside every other consideration to prevent the national disaster that we dread. . . . Therefore, whatever may happen in the country, I do not think it likely that there will be a General Election for three or four years, unless some agreement as to future policy can be arrived at; and when it does come it may be fought by new men and on other issues than are now before us. The outlook is not very comforting; three or four years of bitter wrangling and personal animosity, and then—anarchy or reaction.

You will see I am almost as pessimistic as you are; but in the words of the Swedish schoolmaster I met in Lapland, "the time makes for the melancholies".

September 21.—Morley.—I suppose that your forecast is the most probable, and it certainly "makes for the melancholies". Yet I feel that it is rather discreditable to us all that things should have come to their present desperate pass. There must be some more or less rational way out of it, if we could only find it. It seems to me as if the difficulties were mainly, at bottom, personal. I knew that difficulties of this sort were just the most intractable. Still, the real perils of the crisis for the future of the country are great enough and certain enough to drive one to hope that they might be overcome. However, hope without a plan is idle, and I have no plan, alas.

September 22.—Chamberlain.—I do not think that the difficulties are

BOOK
VIII.
1887.

personal. If an agreement could be found that would settle the question, I would undertake to go out of politics altogether as my part of the bargain. But I am bound both by honour and duty to fight to the death against proposals which in my judgment constitute the greatest national danger with which we have ever been threatened.

So ended, after six months, the alternations of quarrel and parley since the Round Table. Chamberlain's "federalism" for the United Kingdom was never to be revived. It disappeared in the same gulf that was to receive Gladstone's Irish design. Beholding the situation to-day, the considerable ghosts of both men would doubtless claim justification. The Irish Free State represents almost exactly the state of virtual separation that Chamberlain predicted. Ulster stands in integral unity with Great Britain. Ireland is broken. Chamberlain would contend that from the beginning he had the cooler judgment, the surer foresight.

X

Before leaving the country he had some meetings to address. He approached them with distaste; and the task of framing his speeches was troublesome. None the less, he made them with challenging energy. In his annual address to his constituents he had to beat down hostile interruption, but soon carried away his audience.¹

Then towards the middle of October² he went on his tour to Ulster, where at Belfast, Coleraine and other places he enjoyed an immense reception, and roused popular enthusiasm to transports by his ringing and scathing invocations. The Nationalists replied with rage that their countrymen would know how to answer him in the United States. He was much condemned for forcing the anti-Irish note in a manner that seemed certain to prejudice his diplomacy across the Atlantic. But two things must be remembered. His engagements in northern Ireland had been fixed before he accepted the new duty; and for him Ulster was as vital an issue as any other part of the Irish complex. Separate treatment for north-east Ireland he had made from an early date an indispensable article of his programme.

¹ Birmingham, September 29.

² October 10 to 15.

When he came back, his parting words to Hartington were prophetic enough in one way:

CHAP.
XXXV.
Æt. 51.

I doubt if you will win on your present lines, but you have decided, and we must all fight it out as well as we can. Do not forget Ulster—it is a terrible nut for the G.O.M. to crack.¹

His last speech of this series was for his brother Richard at Islington, when he denounced the Irish-Americans to their teeth, having already received sure information that their utmost hostility was certain.

At the end of October he left England, glad to be out of it all, but glad of nothing else—knowing the difficulties in America, determined as ever to “do my best”; doubtful of success; unwitting of what lay before him; or what recompense was reserved, after a period in which he had passed from cheerlessness almost to hopelessness. The man that sailed never would return.

¹ Chamberlain to Hartington, October 27, 1887.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CHAMBERLAIN IN AMERICA—POLITICS AND ROMANCE

(1887-1888)

CHAMBERLAIN in America—New Quarrels on an Old Question—New York and Washington—Canada and Niagara—The Conference resumed—Chamberlain's Popularity and Skill—An Abortive Treaty but a Lasting Settlement—His Letters—Kindred and Empire—The Great Speech at Toronto—A New Man and the Reason—A Late Romance—Engagement to Miss Endicott—"You are the Treaty".

I

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88.

THE diplomacy of the American mission must be understood before we come to the human interest and to Chamberlain's personal romance in his fifty-second year.

For the past eighteen months an ancient feud, sometimes dormant for long periods, had become angry once more. When Canada was seizing and confiscating New England fishing-craft, accused of wilful trespass, peace might lie at the mercy of accident. Towards the end of August 1887 the United States Government proposed a Joint Commission, three on each side.

When accepting Lord Salisbury's invitation to lead the British case, Chamberlain, with his power of studying quickly and intensely, thought he would soon "master the papers". They were to cost him more time and trouble than he supposed. Over the masses of letters and documents in the tin boxes and the dispatch-cases a meticulous student might still wear his eyes out. The old obstinate affair that Chamberlain went to deal with seemed an international equivalent of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*—with this difference that an Anglo-American conflict might result from a chance scuffle and a rash shot. What was the pith of the matter and its history?

This Fisheries dispute went back for generations. Than the New England fishermen a hardier breed was not known, nor a more encroaching and intractable. To their free use, after Chatham's victories in the eighteenth century, were thrown open all the seas to the northward, the coasts and banks as well as the near Atlantic. These facilities, confirmed after the American War of Independence, were abrogated after the war of 1812. A new Convention was severely restrictive. Signed in 1818, it reserved to British North Americans exclusive rights in their own territorial waters. The governing words ran:

CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

And the United States hereby renounce, for ever, any liberty, heretofore enjoyed or claimed by the inhabitants thereof to take, dry or cure fish on or within three marine miles of any of the coasts, bays or creeks or harbours of his Britannic Majesty's dominions (with some exceptions stated), provided, however, that the American fishermen shall be admitted to enter such bays or harbours for the purpose of shelter and of repairing damages therein, of purchasing wood, and of obtaining water, and for no other purpose whatever.¹

Thus the New Englanders no longer might fish just off these northward coasts, nor sell their catch in that quarter, nor buy bait there for use on the fishing-grounds far out. This arrangement worked roughly in every sense for one generation. Then, in 1854—the year when “young Mr. Joseph”, knowing nothing of these things, went from London to Birmingham—a Reciprocity Treaty was happily concluded on mutual principles of free fishing and free selling. This was denounced after the American Civil War by the United States, then under stronger Nationalist and Protectionist influences. Reciprocity was soon restored again—in 1871, when Chamberlain was in the thick of his Nonconformist campaign on education—but it lapsed in 1885. In the two following years, while the United Kingdom was convulsed by the Home Rule question, the trouble between the United States and Canada had become eminently disagreeable. We may say that the “fish-war” in the English-speaking world was as irritating as a “pig-war” in the Balkans a generation ago.

¹ *Further Correspondence respecting the Termination of the Fishery Articles of the Treaty of Washington . . . Jan. to*

June 1886. (Foreign Office Confidential (5307) Paper, p. 75.)

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88.

Hence the theme of this chapter and of much else in this narrative.

Canada, when reciprocity expired once more, was thrown back on exclusive rights in her own waters under the governing Treaty of 1818. Thereunder American fishermen were allowed to use Canadian anchorages for shelter and repairs and for obtaining wood and water, but "for no other purpose whatever". The New England skippers were better versed in custom than in law. Despite the change in the legal situation, they continued their habits, and poached with tenacity. We can understand it. The sea shows no frontier-posts. Hitherto they had made the best of both worlds. Their own catch entered free into their own ports, but the United States imposed a prohibitive duty on Canadian fish caught by Canadians. Irritated into asserting its legal rights more stringently than at any earlier period of contention, the Dominion captured many American vessels.

With each seizure, whether reasonable or high-handed, feeling rose in the United States. Blank shots were fired at American vessels. The risks were too hazardous. The three Governments concerned became equally anxious for an amicable solution. For a long time Ottawa had advocated a Joint Commission. This suggestion was accepted by the United States on August 26—the very day when an embarrassing division in the House of Commons exhibited Liberal Unionism in disarray and Chamberlain's adverse vote troubled the Government. Seldom in politics has coincidence been so convenient.

II

The leader of the House, Mr. W. H. Smith, though he looked very ordinary, was uncommonly shrewd. Whether the original idea was his own or not, within a few hours he sounded the Radical in difficulties. Would the Ishmael amongst statesmen accept a distinguished appointment, and at the same time render a patriotic service, by going to Washington as Chief Commissioner?

Surprised, but ready at the moment for anything new and, above all, for anything distant, Chamberlain said that he would accept the offer if officially made. Instead of rejoining his orchids

he stayed in town for that week-end. The Leader of the House reported to the Prime Minister at Hatfield. Lord Salisbury, on Sunday, telegraphed his satisfaction and then wrote to our subject:

CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

I have submitted your name to the Queen, who approves very highly.¹

The American Minister, Mr. Phelps, sent his congratulations at once:

No appointment could have been more agreeable to me than yours and I am sure it will be equally so to my Government.

Chamberlain replied to the Prime Minister:

August 29.—I appreciate highly the compliment that the Government have paid me in asking me to undertake the responsible duty of principal Commissioner for the settlement of the Fisheries dispute; and in the hope of being able to render some public service, I feel bound to undertake the task and will use my best efforts to bring the matter to a successful and honourable conclusion.

Addressing himself thoroughly to the Foreign Office papers, Chamberlain soon found that he had been invited to a task wherein failure in some degree was almost certain, and total failure pretty probable, to his much diminished repute.

What is signified by the treaty-controlling power of the American Senate the world in more modern days has had cause to know. It was a thing at that time and for long afterwards less generally understood in Europe. Yet the political circumstances existing in the United States five-and-forty years ago made it plain even then that the Senate might prove an insurmountable obstacle to Chamberlain's effort. The "quadrennial orgy" of a presidential election was approaching. In office was the strongest of Democratic presidents, Grover Cleveland. His policy of tariff reduction was unpopular even on his own side. On both sides the Irish vote was a large object of regard. As the Republican Opposition swayed the Senate, it was little likely, to say the least, that any Treaty in President Cleveland's favour would be suffered to pass. Many on both sides of the Atlantic were quick to say that prospects would not be

¹ August 28.

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88.

improved at Washington by the arrival of a statesman conspicuous in Irish-American eyes as Gladstone's great antagonist on Home Rule.

Why, then, did Lord Salisbury ask him to take the risk? There is one good answer. Apart from Ministerial tactics at home, the appointment was altogether admirable. When a Unionist Government was in power in the United Kingdom, when agrarian and political struggle was raging in Ireland, the Irish influence in the United States would do its worst in any case. To stand up to it was the only chance, and of that chance, for whatever it might be worth, Chamberlain was the man to make the most. He was just the type of practical statesman and business-like negotiator that Americans would appreciate. For the work in hand he was pre-eminently qualified—a former President of the Board of Trade, familiar with maritime matters of all kinds, exceptionally acquainted with colonial subjects, as they were then called, and of late especially interested in Canada as a result of studying its federal constitution. His colleagues on the Fisheries Commission were to be Sir Lionel Sackville West, British Minister at Washington, and Sir Charles Tupper, Canadian Minister of Finance.

III

After a civic reception at Liverpool on the last Saturday in October 1887, he eluded the crowd on the landing-stage and by a private tender reached the Cunarder *Etruria* lying in mid-channel of the Mersey. That estuary was rough enough already, as it can be, but from Queenstown the passage was one of the foulest in memory. Huge seas assailed the ship. A life-boat was cast away and a huge ventilator bent double. Some of the seamen were badly hurt and swept off their legs. Captain Cook, then Commodore of the Cunard fleet, was in command. That "skipper" admitted that it was the worst passage he ever remembered. The boatswain said the same thing, and they had both done the trip times without number.¹ Passengers were

¹ These details and many others in this chapter are from Sir Willoughby Maycock's vivacious book, *With Mr. Chamberlain in the United States and*

Canada. He was assistant secretary to the mission. The secretary was Sir Henry Bernge.

battened down half the time and forbidden the deck. Chamberlain was a good sailor and hardly missed a meal, but though he stood the weather, he fled from the smoking saloon, where everyone wanted to pump him.

CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

On November 7 they reached New York. At the Brevoort Hotel in Fifth Avenue a corps of reporters fell upon him at once, and he won their professional admiration by his good-humoured dexterity under cross-examination. They plied him with delicate questions and received straight answers; he was not to be cornered. This sort of ordeal was to be repeated at Washington and elsewhere. The journalists rejoiced to think and say that they were putting him through a fire of questions hotter than he had ever known in the British House of Commons. They found him unfailing in prompt repartee and profuse in hospitable entertainment. They paid him the highest tribute that as newspapermen they could bestow when they called him the "reporters' friend," like their own adept in that character, Chauncy Depew.

At the wish of the American Government, "Pinkerton's men" took charge of him owing to the threats of the Clan-na-Gael, but he loathed the protection. The squad of detectives called themselves delightfully "Mr. Chamberlain's friends", and their head, Captain Hinde, remarked: "If any crank tries to get at Mr. Chamberlain, I guess I'll get there first". And he would, says the recorder.¹

When entertained, a week after landing, by the New York Chamber of Commerce, his first speech on American soil won him hosts of friends. On this occasion, a striking incident showed how good were his reading and his memory—though Liberals at home liked to suggest that the only book he knew was *Oliver Twist*. A well-known American speaker remarked that an English poet said "Commerce is the golden girdle of the globe". In reply, the guest off-hand named the poet, completed the quotation and corrected the small error. The lines, he told them, were Cowper's:

Again—the band of commerce was designed
To associate all the branches of mankind,
And if a bounteous plenty be the robe,
Trade is the golden girdle of the globe.

¹ *With Mr. Chamberlain in the United States and Canada*, p. 29.

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88.

He spent ten crowded days in New York, and on November 17 arrived at Washington, where the Commission was to sit and where his life was to be transformed. There, reckoning for some short intervals of absence, he spent about three ever-memorable months, and became as well known and well liked as any Englishman who had visited America for years. Even for him it was a strenuous time, though he found exhilarating what might have been a killing pace for another. From morning to midnight and after he hardly knew a disengaged hour. Apart from the diplomatic work proper at the State Department and out of it, he had a daunting mass of correspondence to deal with; while official banquets and private dinners, luncheons, afternoon teas, receptions, dances, excursions, evenings at the theatre, with interviews and calls between, were a ceaseless round.

He not only seemed, but felt, tireless and the youngest man of fifty in the world. In a few weeks the spirit and colour of his whole personal life began to be changed and renewed.

Like every other distinguished English visitor new to the scene, he was amazed and touched by American kindness and hospitality. One of his American colleagues, Mr. Putnam, did him the happy compliment of arranging an "orchid banquet", making it probably the most complete floral affair of its kind yet seen in America. In addition were the festivities at the British Legation and his own equal entertainments at the Arlington Hotel. At different times he dined with President Cleveland; began a friendship with John Hay—versatile in literature but afterwards American Ambassador in London, and then Secretary of State—and was admitted to the floor of the Senate. A fortnight before Christmas he and a large party were taken by a Government boat down the Potomac to George Washington's house and tomb at Mount Vernon. It was not his way to use the consecrated expressions, and he is not recorded as making any appropriate remark, but we may be sure that he felt more than he showed.

IV

It is time to follow his activities as a negotiator and to see how he dealt with the tough work he was sent out to handle.

The Joint Commission opened proceedings on November 21,

and did not finish them until mid-February. The plenipotentiaries met officially two or three times a week. The sittings were held at the State Department, where it looks towards the Potomac and George Washington's monument. The scene of the discussion is described as a spacious, imposing room, with ebony furniture, a polished oak floor and Bokhara rugs. Looking down from the walls on the chief American representative, Secretary Bayard, were the portraits of his predecessors in office. The warning presentment of that redoubtable politician in his day, Mr. James G. Blaine, hung exactly over the English Chief Commissioner's head. "Mr. Chamberlain lounges easily in his chair, his big gold-rimmed eye-glass seldom out of his eye."¹

CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

With him were his colleagues, Sir Charles Tupper, robust and able, and the singularly taciturn British Minister, Sir Lionel Sackville West, whose "only oral contribution to the thirty meetings of the conference was the expression of a wish that a certain window might be closed".

One picturesque point was of central importance in the deliberations, of which the course and results must now be summarised. Evident enough were Canada's strict treaty rights within her territorial waters. But in this connection, what were those waters? With islands, peninsulas, capes and promontories; with bays, inlets, straits and channels; with countless indentations and projections of every kind—the shores were intricately configured. Was the three-mile limit to be measured from the shores inside the bays? Or outside the bays, clear of a diplomatic line drawn from headland to headland?

Negotiations, needless to say, were as stubborn as complicated. The chances of success fluctuated widely, even violently, sometimes appearing hopeful, sometimes hopeless. Before Christmas the prospects seemed of the brightest; a few weeks afterwards all looked black.

To the credit of both Governments and their plenipotentiaries, conciliation prevailed. On February 15, 1888, Ash Wednesday, but a red-letter day in his calendar, Chamberlain in the highest

¹ From a description in the *Washington Post* quoted in *With Mr. Chamberlain in the United States and Canada*.

Sir Willoughby Maycock himself adds the next touch.

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88.

spirits signed with his colleagues an auspicious Treaty—and a very lucky Protocol.

The chief instrument established two principles. (1) The Canadian line, recognised as stretching generally from headland to headland, made territorial enclosures of all bays except those over ten maritime miles in width at the mouth; (2) the United States fishermen were to have free access to Canadian coasts and inshore waters as soon as the United States granted free admission of Canadian-caught fish.

Six months later the Republican Opposition in the Senate destroyed the Treaty to thwart Mr. Cleveland and his Democratic administration. In view of the approaching presidential election, which the Republicans expected to win, and did, the possibility of this rejection had been foreseen and well guarded against.

Here the providential Protocol came into play. It had already introduced a *modus vivendi* whereby the Americans, under licence at a small charge, enjoyed in Canadian waters all the facilities and amenities contemplated by the Treaty. The result bore out a well-known diplomatic axiom, "Nothing is so permanent as the provisional". The *modus vivendi* was the real settlement, peacefully continued for many years, until 1912. Then—nearly a quarter of a century afterwards—a Treaty finally disposing of the whole question was settled on the basis negotiated by what may be called the Chamberlain Commission. Towards the improvement of Anglo-American relations he rendered a service of lasting value, and incidentally left a deep mark upon public opinion in Canada.

V

Before the middle of December the Conference adjourned until the first week in the New Year. Our Chief Commissioner arranged to visit Ottawa, to confer with the Dominion Government, and to spend Christmas Day at Government House with the Lansdownes. He was full of old thoughts of home, with new thoughts of what home might be again. On December 30 he spoke publicly at Toronto. There, we may say, he begins boldly his new career as an Imperialist when at short notice he makes one of the greatest speeches of his whole life.

We must return to it. On Sunday, New Year's Day 1888, at Niagara, he saw the Falls, and went under them, putting on grotesque yellow tarpaulins. CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

We had [says one of his companions] to hug the right side of the overhanging cliff, as huge icicles were falling at intervals from above. . . . It was as nasty a walk as I ever remember undertaking, since one false step would have landed us in the Rapids. . . . The roar under these Falls is simply deafening, almost enough alone to make one giddy.¹

The next day a devil-may-care driver in a nondescript four-wheeler gallops them up a rough track on the brink of a precipice. They suddenly come within an inch of dropping into eternity by way of the river two hundred feet below. "Good God, sir," says the Assistant Secretary, "look where we are." Fixing his eye-glass to look out of the window, the Chief remarks: "Humph! I suppose if I'm killed someone will catch it. It isn't my business."²

Returning to Washington with sanguine anticipations at the beginning of 1888, he found the diplomatic atmosphere changed very much for the worse, owing no doubt to his Toronto speech with its ringing call to Canadian spirit and Imperial feeling. There were some ugly jars with hostile senators.

Before Christmas he thought he had the Treaty in his pocket. Now at New Year the Conference came to a deadlock. Chamberlain was on the point of announcing that he must abandon a barren endeavour and go home. Whatever some outsiders desired, none of the negotiators wished it to come to this. The deadlock yielded to good sense. Business went ahead steadily until the doomed Treaty and the saving Protocol were signed. Partisan journals—as he pointed out in his farewell speech in New York—wrote just as in any case they would have written. They declared on one side that Canada had been pusillanimously betrayed; on the other side that the United States had suffered abject humiliation. But in the United States and the Dominion alike there was a good deal of fairer and abler journalism.

His own impressions of the American scene—reserving one subject—and his alternations of hope and gloom as a plenipotentiary, appear in family letters:

¹ *With Mr. Chamberlain in the United States and Canada*, p. 115.

² *Ibid.* p. 117.

TO HIS DAUGHTER BEATRICE

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88.

December 2, 1887.—Dined with Mr. Bayard, Secretary of State, who is particularly candid and pleasant. . . . Mr. Bayard spoke freely of Mr. Gladstone, saying that he had "left the realm of law for that of passion". . . . Two personal items for your amusement. A young lady asked which was the Chief Commissioner. On that distinguished individual being pointed out, she said: "Wal, I think he's just lovely". Another American, of the male sex, told a secretary that he was rather disappointed in Mr. Chamberlain's height. He had thought "your principal men in England were taller than that". . . . I am compelled to admit that as far as I have seen the average of American female beauty is higher than ours.

December 28 (from Ottawa).—As regards my Mission, I have settled everything satisfactorily here, and unless the unexpected hitch occurs at Washington, I have the Treaty in my pocket.

January 13, 1888.—I never saw so many bright and pretty women. . . . I have taken to dancing and revived my waltzing and polking. . . . All anxious they say to have my secret of perpetual youth. I give them my receipt freely, "No exercise and smoke all day".

January 18.—I have been very anxious and miserable this week owing to a hitch in the negotiations, which now look less promising than at any previous time.

January 26.—Since my last letter the Mission has got into smooth water again. We are making great progress. In fact, I begin to see the end of things.

February 3.—I heard another good *mot* of Senator Evarts worthy of Sidney Smith. He was driving out with Mr. Dana, who began praising the "laughing brooks". Said Evarts, "Is it not an anomalous thing, Mr. Dana, that in this country where there are so many laughing brooks it should be an actionable offence to divert a watercourse?"

February 10.—We have only one more point to settle. It is a ticklish one—so ticklish that I threatened on Tuesday to break off upon it.

February 17.—The Treaty and accompanying protocols were signed yesterday.¹ It is perfectly satisfactory to me and also to Sir Charles Tupper. . . . I have preserved an equable demeanour during the whole discussion and have never lost hope and confidence, but now I admit

¹ This must have been written after the midnight of February 16. The Treaty was signed on February 15.

that I am in rollicking spirits. . . . I have had a most interesting and delightful experience.

CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

Two letters to Sancho, the only intimate political comrade left to him at home, bring out more strongly his revulsions of feeling as the prospect looked blackest or the clouds cleared:

TO JESSE COLLINGS

January 22, 1888.— . . . If I had known what I do now I should never have come out on such a forlorn hope. Yet in spite of this I believe that I shall succeed! . . . I have almost a superstition as to my luck which saves me from despair, although at times there has seemed no issue. . . .

February 17.— . . . Although I ought not perhaps to say it, it is really a tremendous personal triumph. . . . I have been perfectly well all the time, and have stood the racketting as if I were only 25 instead of something that I had rather not recall. . . .

Recognising his signal skill and attractiveness throughout this trying business, the American newspapers in general were as kind as party circumstances allowed. It rained congratulations. His official dispatch to Lord Salisbury on the results of his Mission was a model of clarity. Acknowledging it, the Prime Minister found just words: "The signature of the Treaty . . . has in a great measure been attained through the conspicuous ability and judgment exhibited by yourself during these delicate negotiations".

VI

None of his other utterances across the Atlantic approached the eloquent power of his great address in Toronto at the end of December. Owing to its significance for his political future, we must mark well this effort. At the Board of Trade dinner he responded to the toast of "The Commercial Interests of the Empire", but lifted the theme:

I am an Englishman. I am proud of the old country from which I came. I am not unmindful of the glorious traditions attached to it, of those institutions moulded by slow centuries of noble endeavour; but I should think our patriotism was warped and stunted indeed if it did not embrace the Greater Britain beyond the seas—the young and

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88.

vigorous nations carrying everywhere a knowledge of the English tongue and English love of liberty and law. With these feelings, I refuse to speak or to think of the United States as a foreign nation. They are our flesh and blood. . . .

What is the fact in regard to these peoples, the older and the younger nations? Our past is theirs. Their future is ours. You cannot if you would break the invisible bond which binds us together. Their forefathers are our forefathers. They worshipped at our shrines. They sleep in our churchyards. They helped to make our institutions, our literature and our laws. These things are their heritage as much as ours. If you stood up to deny it, your speech and countenance, your manner of life and institutions would all combine to betray you. . . .

It may yet be that the federation of Canada may be the lamp lighting our path to the federation of the British Empire. If it is a dream—it may be only the imagination of an enthusiast—it is a grand idea. It is one to stimulate the patriotism and statesmanship of every man who loves his country; and whether it be destined or not to perfect realisation, at least let us all cherish the sentiment it inspires. Let us do all in our power to promote it and enlarge the relations and goodwill which ought always to exist between sons of England throughout the world and the old folks at home.

In this thrilling appeal to memory and imagination he surpassed himself. In flow and glow, with a controlled manner of delivery, he was then an orator, as outside Parliament he sometimes was, and would often have been in the House as out of it but that he could so rarely bring himself to allow his discipline of suppression to melt. One who was present describes the scene:

Reading this in cold type one gathers but little idea of the grandeur and force of the delivery. It was a magnificent piece of oratory. . . . The effect was electrical and I shall never forget the scene that followed. The audience was simply carried away in frenzied enthusiasm.¹

Old eyes were blind with tears, but saw in vision again the island that had bred them long ago and still could breed a leader. It seemed as though the shouting would never end. Of late there had been much talk of slipping into silent secession from the Empire by commercial union with the United States. The morn-

¹ *With Mr. Chamberlain in the United States and Canada*, p. 112.

ing after this speech that idea was dead in Toronto and weakened throughout the Dominion. The great dream that he had now vivified as never before, to himself as well as to his hearers, haunted him till he died. He was to give life and all for it in the end.

CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

VII

What had made him a new man? What was the secret of the new happiness and elasticity that had come to him in the few weeks since he arrived at Washington? A short answer tells everything. He was in love. Nearing fifty-two he was in love again, and it was a second spring.

When at that point of life both the heart and intelligence are suddenly and deeply taken in the case of a man of this type so much younger than his years, the well-known effect is to give a sort of magic to maturity. This phenomenon is familiar enough in history and fiction, and good psychologists understand it. It must already have appeared from these pages that for all the habits of practical efficiency with which he was associated in the public view, Chamberlain—through his Harben stock on the mother's side—was a latent romantic, as men of action often are, without the outward signs perceptible in most poets and artists.

It happened to him accordingly—in a moment and at sight. From the first he had been struck by the beauty and the quick minds of so many American women. For this revelation, given to all the world since that time, it is pleasant to know that our statesman was quite unprepared, however tutored in knowledge of politicians.

On November 26, 1887, a great reception in honour of the Queen's representative was held at the British Legation by Sir Lionel Sackville West, whose eldest daughter, now the dowager Lady Sackville, was the hostess. The *Washington Post* called it "the most brilliant social event of the season".¹ One of the persons present was a world-famous veteran of the American Civil War, General "Phil" Sheridan. From ten o'clock onwards the guests were presented to Chamberlain as they arrived. Amongst them, presently introduced to him by Miss West, was Mary, the daughter of Judge Endicott, then Secretary of War in President

¹ *With Mr. Chamberlain in the United States and Canada*, p. 51.

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88.

Cleveland's first administration. Of her family more must be said, but just at this point we must keep to things as they happened. Miss Endicott was a girl in her twenty-fourth year and shone at once as a "bright particular star" in the eyes of the English statesman for whom these festivities were held.

What he felt was not only extreme admiration but some instant inexplicable affinity — the psychological magnetism as some call it, perhaps with more literal truth than they know. As soon as he could, he left the door of the drawing-room where he had been standing during the presentations, and went over to the mantelpiece where was Miss Endicott, and talked to her until it became evident that he had forgotten everyone else. The Minister's daughter, hostess of the evening, had to remind him of his duty to society in general.

The guests dispersed after midnight, and he went back to the Arlington Hotel. For Chamberlain to sit up far into the small hours with his cigar was no new thing. It was his manner of relaxation for years before as for years after. During his Mission to America he was later than usual, rarely getting to sleep before two or three o'clock, though fresh and punctual next morning. The weather had been very warm for the time of year. That night in Washington was as close as midsummer. Throwing open his window, he leaned out, and, smoking on for a long time, he looked up at the stars and wondered. Was it possible?

Through twelve years there had been, as we know, this shadow upon his mind, that he was fated in one way never to be happy again, and debarred from asking any woman to be his wife, lest she might die, too. To friendship he had clung the more, but we have seen by what disasters, for reasons beyond him to prevent, his dearest friendships had been overtaken. Even in politics, loneliness seemed to be his destined portion. His hand was against the majority of advanced Liberals and Nonconformists, whose service had been his cause from early manhood to his fiftieth year, and their support his mainstay in return. He had never felt so utterly lonely in every way as in the months before he left England. "Sancho" remained, no doubt, but the devoted Jesse Collings was no intellectual compensation for the comradeship of Dilke and Morley. He truly loved Jesse, but the overflowing optimism of this faithful adherent's simple views of

life and eternity sometimes irked him almost past bearing. In his heart he had borne a standing grudge against the terms of existence. Was it possible yet that all might be different? CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

VIII

He thought of the disparity of their ages. How little he felt it. The very theme of endless remark in America was that no other man over fifty so looked and talked and moved like a young man. Like many characters with intense energy, Napoleon for one, his complexion was of the pale cast, but his hair was jet black, his grey-blue eyes glinted, his step had a spring, his build was light, all his ways were instinct with alacrity. In dress he was exact and set the style. The American reporters made a minute inventory of his personal traits. Some described him as "all smiles", though his scrutinising eye-glass was apt to make a careless interrogator feel uncomfortable. Others saw him as "a typical Englishman with stern, clear-cut features". No one ever thought of calling him middle-aged. In all these accounts the word never occurred.

In a few days he felt sure that if he could choose one woman in the world it would be Mary Endicott. He was a guest in her parents' house and saw her more and more. We must allow that he found a word more apt than is common in these situations, when he remarked again and again that he had met in America a lady by Reynolds or Gainsborough, it might be either, walking out of her frame. One who saw much of them both at that time remembered with amusement that "he fairly chased all the young men away". Presently that occupation was not required, for his affection was returned. Miss Endicott had found, in her turn, two things. First, he was so spirited in conversation, so full of interests—in a word, so "light in hand", as she said—that no sense of a difference in years was ever felt between them.

When, after Christmas, he returned from Canada he was strongly confirmed in all he had felt before. Washington society buzzed about the Chief Commissioner's ardent attachment, and by the end of January the gossip got into some newspapers. He waited for the success of his Mission. A few days before the

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88. signature of the Treaty and the Protocol they became, with her parents' consent, engaged.

For political reasons, a hard condition of patience was attached. In the presidential contest of the ensuing autumn the chances of the whole Democratic party with the Irish vote would be prejudiced were it known that the daughter of President Cleveland's Secretary of War was to marry the hated Radical challenger of Gladstone and Parnell. The engagement was to be kept most strictly secret. The marriage must be deferred for six months at least. He chafed strongly, but there was no help for it, and he was well aware of his compensations. For good, he was both a happier and a more redoubtable man, reconciled to life and re-inspired in every way. His instincts were more lucky than he guessed. He told his future wife in one of their early conversations that if, in any reasonable number of years, a chance of returning to office should come to him—which he doubted—he meant to be Colonial Secretary. There, he said, he saw "work to be done".

IX

Miss Endicott came of a historic line in New England. Their origin was knitted up with all the early annals of Massachusetts. Their original founder, a very able and grim Puritan, was that John Endicott¹ of Devon who crossed the Atlantic aboard the *Abigail* in the summer of 1628 and was sent out to rule at Salem for the Dorchester Company. Elected Governor of Massachusetts again and again—with intervals out of office—he held sway at length through nearly all Cromwell's time. In protest against ungodly emblems, with his own sword, still preserved like the portrait of his uncompromising countenance, he cut out of the flag the Red Cross of St. George, and was censured, not for the last time. He fought Indians, harassed Quakers, coined money, resisted the Crown before the Lord Protector's time, and, after it, was no friend to the Restoration. His descendants, through the next two centuries and more, were identified with a little town of extraordinary character—God-fearing, witch-hunting, seafaring and priva-teering Salem.

¹ The name was spelt at that time Endecott.

There, within a few minutes' walk of the spot where their ancestor landed, they lived in Essex Street, celebrated by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the oldest street. The house they lived in latterly was as old, with its hipped roof overlooking its neighbours. Around it the elms had grown old. Inter-marriage connected these people through generations with most of the other strong stocks in "the old Bay State". With Putnams—and so with General Israel Putnam, who after many adventures commanded the American forces at Bunker Hill—as with Winthrops, Lawrences, Gardners, Parkers. The head of the family, at this time Judge Endicott, Secretary of War in the Cleveland Cabinet, was a personality full of reserve and kindness. He was handsome and his wife beautiful. She had been a Miss Peabody, distantly related to George Peabody, the banker and philanthropist whom London remembers as a benefactor.

CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

When Judge Endicott left the bench half a decade before the time of which we are writing, he visited Europe with his wife and daughter. Though at that time they missed meeting the Radical leader when he was President of the Board of Trade, they had become well acquainted with Mr. Gladstone's Solicitor-General, afterwards Lord Herschell—a conciliatory member of the Round Table Conference. It was very recent history when Chamberlain came to Washington. That Miss Endicott was acquainted with London already, and understood the Round Table and its sequel, must have counted for something in conversations which removed all doubts and made them feel as though they had known each other all their lives. Mantegazza used to say that the critical question about marriage is whether after it you can keep up conversation with your wife. Women may put the counter-question. In this case, both parties beforehand felt sure of the answer and were not deceived. When the Senate rejected Chamberlain's elaborate agreement, without hurt to his working settlement, he could say to her, "You are the real Treaty: the other does not matter".

X

To concerns prosaic by comparison we must return, glancing at some concluding account of his activities and experiences in the

BOOK
VIII.
1887-88.

United States after the signing of the Treaty and the Protocol. When asked by the correspondent of *The Times* to say what he really thought, he answered:

I am thoroughly satisfied with the result. I do not claim to have gained a victory. No sensible man wishes to obtain a triumph over friends. I have regarded this difference as one between friends, but what I do claim is that we have arrived at a just and honourable settlement.

Some days later a Washington journal remarked:

Never has there been such a diner-out and a giver of dinners in this town as the gentleman who is going back in a few days to his seat in the House of Commons. To him chiefly is it attributable that the present winter has been the greatest season for dinner parties that Washington has ever known. And they have been gay and enjoyable feasts, too, for the Honourable Joseph has his wits about him and does not ask any odds from the keenest of Yankee combatants in a contest of wit and persiflage, any more than he needs to do in dealing with matters of State.¹

Before leaving for home, Chamberlain paid a short, happy visit to Philadelphia. There he addressed at a banquet the old Society of St. George, a good institution founded in 1772, before the separation, and especially friendly to the old country; and afterwards he spoke at length to a large gathering of a wide association still more affectionately identified with the English tradition—the Order of the Sons of St. George. He visited Independence Hall, where the severance of the English-speaking world was decreed more than a century before.

Thence to New York again, where, on March 2, his last speech on American soil was addressed to the Canadian Club in explanation and vindication of the Treaty. When he closed his stirring appeal for Anglo-American friendship, there was “tremendous cheering”—says the reporter—with waving of handkerchiefs, and renewed cheering for “Chamberlain”. The *New York Herald* remarked next day:

He threw aside the reserve with which a diplomatist is usually supposed to mask his opinions and took his hearers entirely into his

¹ *With Mr. Chamberlain in the United States and Canada*, p. 150.

confidence. . . . His speech came as a surprise and created a profound impression. It was a bold and ingenious defence of the Treaty against the attacks upon it which have been current both here and in Canada.

CHAP.
XXXVI.
Æt. 51.

It was noticed that at this banquet he not only looked radiant but wore a red rose in his buttonhole instead of his accustomed orchid. The same night he drove down to the docks to embark on the Cunarder *Umbria*, and carried with him Miss Endicott's portrait in a dispatch-case, often unlocked. Six months before, he had accepted his American Mission at twenty-four hours' notice, not dreaming that it would change his whole life. He had always thought of writing a good play. This time he lived one.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ENGLAND AGAIN—A NEW MAN—MARRIAGE TO MISS ENDICOTT

(1888–1889)

HOME again—A Plea for Greater Policy—From Truce to Combat—An imperilled Situation—"Birmingham preserved"—The Year of Waiting—Letters to Miss Endicott—Chamberlain self-depicted—Politics and Society in 1888—Power without Office—The "Complete Plan" for Ireland—His New Caucus—"The Art of Speech-making"—The Nationalists and Vendetta—Flowers and Books—Memories and Dreams—A Life in Order—Marriage in Washington—A Happy Match.

I

BOOK
VIII.
1888–89. ON his return he was met by municipal and other addresses at Liverpool, and at Birmingham a good gathering at a late hour attended "this home-coming of mine".¹ Party rancour gave way for the moment to generous amenity. Good Conservatives were only afraid lest their Radical associate and disturber might produce another of his confounded programmes to prod them on.² When he reported himself at the Foreign Office, Lord Salisbury's cordial welcome helped to put their personal relations on a better footing. At the Queen's desire, the Prime Minister offered him the Grand Cross of the Bath.³ Instead, he asked that Her Majesty would give him her portrait autographed, and this was graciously bestowed. With the spirit which had made his staff devoted to "the Chief" during the Mission—as, with good reason, his subordinates always were—he exerted himself to secure full honours and rewards for his colleagues and assistants.

Birmingham towards the end of March presented him with

¹ Saturday evening, March 10, 1888. Esher, to Chamberlain, March 13, 1888.

² Reginald Brett, afterwards Lord ³ To Miss Endicott, March 14, 1888.



“JOSEPH’S SWEETHEART”

(A Fieldingesque fragment of a Tale of Love and Loyalty. Adapted to the situation)

Showing how our hero rejects with scorn the proffered title at the hands of Lady Tory Diplomacy and clings to the object of his first love, Dear Democracy.

From the cartoon by Linley Sambourne reproduced in *Punch*, March 31, 1888, by kind permission of the Proprietors

the freedom of his own town, not before bestowed on any man. CHAP.
XXXVII.
ÆT. 52-53.
His reply should be noted, as showing how he was rooted in local strength like no statesman before or since: "I can never forget that my apprenticeship to public life was served in Birmingham in company with many of those I see around me to-day and in connection with the municipal work which you are still carrying on."¹ At the banquet in the Town Hall that evening, the new Freeman praised transatlantic hospitality, and again advocated "perpetual amity and goodwill between all the members of the English-speaking race".

John Bright followed with the last speech he ever made in public—a strange discourse for the occasion. Describing the idea of Imperial federation as "a dream and an absurdity", he pleaded with a noble vagueness that the British Empire should remain an inoffensive figment for the sake of promoting the moral union and practical convenience of the English-speaking world. Yet he joined in praise of his younger colleague:

I think it is a matter of which Birmingham may be proud that my friend here, near me, your eminent citizen, has been able by a good fortune which statesmen may envy, and by an exertion of abilities which are peculiar and singular, and not in many cases excelled or equalled—that he has been able to render a service to his country and to the blessed cause of peace which will give him pleasure, I hope, to the last hour of his life.

No one there guessed that it was John Bright's swan-song, after fifty years of oratory unmatched in our language for perfect purity of style and moral dignity together, though the intellectual force was not of the same degree.

The tributes of old friends, now opponents, gave Chamberlain most pleasure. When he was entertained at the Devonshire Club, amiable Lord Granville took the chair; Childers and Fowler attended, though other Gladstonian leaders declined, including Harcourt and Morley. The faces he most wished to see were not there. It was pleasing and dubious—shall we say like an Eskimo banquet on rather soft ice; but he bore himself well. Indirectly he replied to Bright, with the new energy of faith in the Empire that now filled him.

¹ Birmingham Town Council, March 28, 1888.

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89. There is a word which I am almost afraid to mention. I have been assured on the highest authority that confederation is an empty dream, the fantastic vision of fools and fanatics.

It cannot be. The vision is too fair
For creatures doomed to breathe terrestrial air.
Yet not for that shall sober reason frown
Upon that promise, nor that hope disown.
We know that only to high aims are due
Rich guerdons, and to them alone ensue.

I am well aware that up to the present time no practical scheme of federation has been submitted or suggested, but I do not think that such a scheme is impossible. . . . It may be at least as much to the interests of the colonies as to those of the mother country that we should seek and find a concerted system of defence. The difficulty in the case of commercial union is no doubt much greater. It is no use to expect that our colonies will abandon their customs duties as their chief and principal source of revenue. . . . All we can do is to wait until proposals are made to us . . . to consider those proposals when they come with fairness and impartiality ; and to accept them if they do not involve the sacrifice of any important principle or of any interest vital to our population.¹

The conduct of those Gladstonian statesmen who made this meeting possible was not agreeable to the majority of their party. Childers for forgetting himself was rejected by the Eighty Club.² Labouchere had begun to play the gadfly whenever there seemed a chance to bite his lost leader. At the earliest opportunity, moving to reduce the Foreign Office vote by £3900, the cost of the Fisheries Mission, he went into petty details to prove the sum "monstrous". He was out of his reckoning in all ways. From the outset, as it happened, Chamberlain had stipulated for the smallest possible staff. No mission of this rank has been more economically managed. "Labby's" method revolted the fair feeling of the House, and the vote was approved by a majority of 246.³

¹ Devonshire Club, April 9, 1888.

² We must keep in mind, though, that Unionists were equally embittered against Gladstonian Liberals,

excluded from some aristocratic houses, and largely boycotted in society.

³ March 1, 1888.

II

From all this Chamberlain turned with redoubled vigour to the immediate tasks of politics and of his own life.

In Birmingham the position nearly went to pieces in his absence. There the battle had to be fought all over again. This time, resolved to make victory final, he shaped out the means. For local and national reasons equally, the Unionist alliance in his city had to be consolidated. In spite of all difficulties he must look more than hitherto to the Tory masses, vigorously democratic in their way as well as patriotic. A progressive policy both for Ireland and Great Britain had to be pressed on the unwilling Conservative Government to the point of making it miserable. But—whenever it was in real danger of being overthrown it must be propped. Upheld whatever the issue and no matter what charges of inconsistency might whirl round his own head. To this major purpose all minor considerations must give way. He was strongly helped when Mr. Ritchie introduced a great measure—embodying part of Chamberlain's far wider plan when he was President of the Local Government Board—the broad-spirited Bill for establishing County Councils, and for giving licensing control to these popular bodies. Pretty well for the Tories. True, Parish Councils were not simultaneously created as he, when Radical leader, had designed; but he did not despair of getting Parish Councils from the Tories another day.

Gladstone and his followers were delighted by Randolph Churchill's word describing Liberal Unionism as the "crutch" of the Cabinet. Bending their efforts to knock away that support, they concentrated their main attack, throughout the constituencies and in the House, upon Hartington's and Chamberlain's followers, accused of the darkest responsibility for coercion and all Ministerial turpitude. The Gladstonian dead set had to be met with fibre on the one hand. On the other, the separate existence of the Liberal Unionists of both wings had to be defended against increasing Conservative demands for fusion.

Instead, the Radical Unionist advocated a National party. The democratic side of Unionism in domestic policy must be reinforced by a new Imperial appeal.

CHAP.
XXXVII.
Æt. 52-53.

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

Great plans were needed. The "flowing tide" of Liberal success, though not now sweeping and foaming on as in the preceding year, when by-elections rolled like billows, was still flowing. The Home Rulers were primed with confidence under the high leadership of the old orator whom they regarded as their "mighty prophet, seer blest".

Again, Chamberlain had before him an array of perplexities, but full hope now possessed him; he felt that if he lived he would wear his opponents down. He believed again in his star: in his "luck". Usually luck was obedient to him, at Monte Carlo for instance. Though he had known like every statesman his checks now and then, he had never been thrown back until the coalition of Gladstone and Parnell. Palmists saw in his hand an extraordinary "line of luck". The late Lord Fisher perhaps dispelled the mystery when he remarked: "What they call the devil's own luck is only a careful attention to detail".

III

When leaving America at the beginning of March he fully expected to return in a few months and to be married at latest in June.

He wrote so often to Miss Endicott, always several times a week and sometimes every day, that his letters are like a diary. After a day crowded with exertion enough to exhaust another man, it was now his chief pleasure to sit down after midnight and write on and on with the epistolary amplitude of Pamela. What was most personal is not for our knowledge, but a full flow of extracts from the rest must be given. They throw light upon a remarkable phase of transition in public affairs as upon the social movements and interests of the time.

And they are a revelation of himself such as he never put on paper before or after. We must not look for literary style and turned phrases. Chamberlain, in his other way, was no more capable than Gladstone of writing as Beaconsfield wrote to Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield. But he gives Miss Endicott the ample record of his activities and thoughts. They arrange that though on different sides of the Atlantic they shall read the same books. As the long months wear on, the delay becomes harder for his

intensely self-willed nature to bear. He feels bitted and curbed. For some time he hopes that the suspensory veto may be at least relaxed so as to enable him to revisit Washington in the summer. But, after all, he had to chafe and fret till November. In the sequence of letters next given we are arrested by one sentence touching South Africa—"I mean some day to be Colonial Minister and to deal with it".

TO MISS ENDICOTT

March 15, 1888.—I went into the House which broke into tremendous cheers. . . . Lord Salisbury has asked me to dinner, but I am engaged. I gather that he thinks war on the Continent very possible, and the correspondent of the *Kreuz Zeitung*, who called on him to-day, declares that it is certain as soon as the warm weather begins. He says Russia has massed 800,000 men into position and Germany is quite prepared for the struggle. . . . If war does really break out everything else will be put into the shade by the vastness of the conflict.¹

March 19.—The whole question of the government of South Africa and of our relations with the native tribes is very interesting, and difficult. I mean some day to be Colonial Minister and to deal with it, and I should much like to pay a visit to the Cape—but shall we ever get time for this? . . . The Local Government Bill was introduced to-night. It is a good measure, thoroughly Liberal in its main provisions and based very much on my lines. . . .

March 21.—They tell me that I made a first-rate debating speech [against Parnell's Arrears of Rent Bill], and certainly I pleased my friends. I did not think it very good myself. . . .

(*Later*)—It appears that my speech was a tremendous success. The members of the Government say that I saved them; while my own party are enthusiastic. I am puzzled over it, as you will be when you read the report. . . .

March 24.— . . . Everyone was in good spirits [at Lady Lympington's reception], as the Unionist cause is looking up just now and the Gladstonians are in dire depression. They expected that we should go to pieces over the Local Government Bill, and that proves to be a

¹ The old Emperor William I. had just died, and it was widely felt that Europe's period of stability had passed with him. Russia was protesting against the illegality of recognising

Ferdinand of Coburg as Prince of Bulgaria. In the Tsardom feeling against the Central Empires was strong (Schulthess, *Europäisches Geschichtskalender* (1888), pp. 380-382).

BOOK tremendous success. Then they hoped that we should be in a hole over
 VIII. the Arrears question, but my Amendment got over the difficulty. . . .
 1888-89. Meanwhile the change in the House is marvellous. The new rules work
 well,¹ and the House has resumed the orderly and dignified conduct of
 public business. . . . I always felt confident that sooner or later we
 should shake off the incubus of obstruction, but the reformation has
 come and is more complete than I expected. . . . My host, Sir —, has
 studied every colonial question on the spot, has offered himself for every
 Commission that has been appointed, and thinks it strange that suc-
 cessive Governments will choose people like myself. . . . He is a perfect
 encyclopaedia, and cannot understand why he is never taken down
 from the shelf. It was a queer dinner. . . .

April 16.—I had to lunch with me Mr. Stewart Cumberland, the
 thought reader. . . . I found him amusing. . . . After he left I went down
 to the House and made a speech rendering the Gladstonians perfectly
 furious. . . . I spoke for about an hour and had a full House.

April 25.—It is a peculiarity of the House of Commons that a “sensa-
 tion” comes unexpectedly sometimes in the middle of the dullest
 debates. The discussion had been dull all day. Gladstone had spoken,
 but in a rather half-hearted way, and Balfour was to answer him. The
 subject was a Bill for the extension of Local Government in Ireland.
 It was not really a serious proposal, but one of those traps the Irish are
 always laying with the hope of dividing the Unionist Party and making
 a breach between the Liberal Unionists and the Conservative Govern-
 ment. Balfour argued the matter from rather a Conservative stand-
 point. . . .

Thereupon Randolph Churchill, in the character of a candid friend,
 fell upon him. He showed, amidst the ill-restrained anger of his own
 party and the inexpressible delight of the Parnellites, that all parties
 were pledged to deal with the subject. . . . What he said was true but in
 a manner offensivè to his party and most mischievous.

When he sat down there were only ten minutes left before the time
 for adjournment. I had not intended to speak, but the situation was
 critical, and I rose to follow him. I tried to say the same thing in quite
 a different way, and to assume that the Government were alive to their
 responsibilities. . . .

¹ The changes in procedure to crush obstruction were in fact amongst the
 strongest of Unionist achievements.

Everyone is talking of the scene this evening. I have pleased my own friends and the Government, but I am afraid that I have once more bitterly offended Randolph. I hope not, because I like him very much, but fate seems to throw us into apparent opposition.

CHAP.
XXXVII.
Æt. 52-53.

April 28.—I had a long talk with Randolph, and have induced him to give up another attack on the Government which he was meditating for Monday. I hope that is a good stroke of business, and now it is 3 A.M.

May 3.— . . . My host [at dinner] was Froude, the historian, who was also sent out by Lord Carnarvon some years ago as Commissioner. There were also . . . Lord Derby and Sir Henry de Villiers, Chief Justice of the Cape Colony. We had, to me, a most interesting conversation [on South African policy and the native question]. The three gentlemen were all opposed to the conclusions I had formed, though for very different and inconsistent reasons. . . . I am inclined to advocate a bold policy, fully recognising Imperial responsibilities and duty, but then I intend that it should be the policy of the Imperial and not of the Cape Government, and should be carried out by officials taking their instructions from the former. Whatever I decide to say . . . it is at least a great advantage to know the objections to my proposals. . . .

May 4.—The story of my being asked to join the Cabinet is altogether without foundation. No doubt if Lord Salisbury were to go, and there are persistent rumours that he is ill and will not remain much longer, the probability is that Hartington would be asked to take the lead and in that case he would certainly ask me to join.

May 5.—I sat next the Duchess of Manchester. . . . She told me that Hartington had said that if he were called to the House of Lords—his father, the Duke of Devonshire, is now eighty—he could now leave the leadership in the Commons in my hands with perfect confidence. She also said that it was unlikely that Salisbury would continue much longer as Prime Minister and that then there must be reconstruction. Hartington would be willing to become head of the Government—but would not do so unless I would join him. I told her that I could not undertake to do this, that I did not care a scrap for office or position, although I admitted that I cared for power; that my present position gave me power without responsibility . . . that Hartington had opposed my policy three years ago, that now I found it accepted both by him and the Government,¹ and that I preferred this result of my independence

¹ Apparently referring to British local government on a democratic basis.

BOOK
VIII.

1888-89.

to anything that office could give. Afterwards, I was in close conference with Hartington, to whom I had no doubt everything would be repeated. I could not under any circumstances join a Government again without assurance that my views would be generally accepted. . . .

These notes show his rise towards individual ascendancy in the House of Commons. We saw how his hand was strengthened when the Cabinet introduced one of the outstanding measures of the century and realised a long-delayed hope of advanced Liberalism by extending popular government to the counties. Consulted beforehand, when there was some idea of a restricted franchise for County Councils, Chamberlain insisted that the basis of representative control must be the same as for the boroughs. "I had made it a *sine qua non*".¹ He was now well able to contend, as he ever afterwards did with increasing popular effect, that Unionism was the saner, more efficient force of constructive progress—well able to carry reforms which Gladstone's Irish monomania would frustrate for indefinite time.

A squall blew up on the Licensing Clauses. They enabled the new County Councils to reduce the number of licences on condition of compensation to dislodged publicans, and also gave some additional powers of regulating the hours allowed for the sale of liquor. Chamberlain had always been for compensation. His own large scheme of local government in 1886 meant to provide for it. He thought these new proposals a real advance in practical reform of the drink traffic. The temperance party fiercely opposed and the Government withdrew the clauses. Chamberlain would rather have fought it out. "I hate withdrawing anything."

IV

Less than ever was the Radical Unionist content with a negative policy on Ireland. When he came to the rescue of the Government against Parnell on the land question and against Lord Randolph on local government his method was ingenious. He argued for a wider plan than Parnell's to relieve Irish tenants distressed by arrears of unfair rents and by other debts. As

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

for Irish local government and Lord Randolph's maxim of "similarity and simultaneity", Chamberlain accepted ^{CHAP. XXXVII.} "similarity" to the British measure; but as for the parallel ^{ÆT. 52-53.} principle of "simultaneity", how could it be literally applied? Two complicated Bills of that kind could not be managed in the same session. Limited delay was unavoidable, but he sharply repudiated the idea of unnecessary postponement.

Nor, though tactical, was he insincere. He now conceived and soon made public a big scheme for the "practical settlement" of the Irish Question, excluding nothing but the national demand, which he thought, most mistakenly, to be sentimental and ephemeral. For this effort his mind was a stithy with all hammers clanging. He took enormous pains to collect information; interviewing many persons; carrying on heavy correspondence; seeking to persuade Hartington and the Chief Secretary, Balfour, that coercion without reconstruction would be fatal to the Union and to the parties standing for it.

In many conferences with Bunce, the editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post*—who did a good deal of the writing—Chamberlain arranged in detail and supervised the elaborate series of articles subsequently republished as *A Unionist Policy for Ireland*.

Towards the end of May he addressed in the Town Hall the first big meeting of his new and dominant Caucus—the Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association. "I am taunted sometimes with having deserted my friends. Where are the friends I have deserted? I don't miss them in this hall. I am quite prepared to admit that the Government—this Government—does not go far enough for me; I have never found a Government yet that did." There could be no question of allowing Ireland to block the way; but Irish interests ought to have equal freedom of traffic now that the road was reopened. "Every Unionist, whether Liberal or Conservative, must be anxious to escape from this labyrinth of Irish disaffection." The programme included public works, especially in the congested districts, the completion of land purchase, and provincial councils.

The series of reprinted articles, framed on the systematic method of the old Radical programme, was anonymous, but the inspirer unmistakable. Though the hand was not confessed, the voice was taken as the voice of Jacob. Throughout the country

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

this wide scheme excited interest and comment for a time. A large degree of friendly feeling existed on the Liberal side and was expressed by Gladstone himself. Canon MacColl happened to be staying at Hawarden when the first of the Birmingham articles came out, and communicated to Highbury the remark of his host:

It is excellent so far as it goes, though there are some things in it which I do not like; if Parnell were to ask my opinion of it (which he is not likely to do) I should say "Accept it, by all means".¹

Here the next group of letters to America takes up the tale.

TO MISS ENDICOTT

April 13, 1888.— . . . I had a visit from Captain O'Shea, an amusing Irishman, formerly a member of Parliament, a friend of Parnell's, with whom he has since quarrelled. He is a great supporter of mine and has been very useful to me, occasionally, in all Irish matters, but like all Irish politicians he is, I am afraid, unscrupulous and cynical. . . .

April 22.—You must know that I have a complete scheme for settling the Irish question under the three heads of Public Works, Land, and Local Government; but hitherto I have kept them pretty much to myself, as I do not think the time ripe for announcing them. . . . Our party want something more than a negative policy. It is hardly enough to prove that Mr. Gladstone is wrong. We ought to say that we have an alternative of our own and fight it out on the issue between the two policies. If I finally decide to publish, it will make a great sensation, I think, and may have an important effect on the situation. I am afraid that I cannot expect Hartington's approval, but he is always inclined to hang back and afraid of a constructive policy. I pressed him to do something of this sort before I went to America, and if he had done so I should not have gone, but should have remained to advocate it. Thank goodness he refused!

April 28.—I took the opportunity to speak to Balfour last night on the subject of a large remedial policy. . . . I think I made some impression, and I am to see him again when he has had time to think it over. I also saw Goschen on the same subject.

May 3.—I had a long talk with Hartington about the situation, and

¹ Canon MacColl to Chamberlain, June 28, 1888.

especially with regard to the publication of some sort of programme in the Birmingham paper in the shape of a series of articles, to be inspired by me, on the Irish question. I found him more reasonable than I expected, and secured his assent to the proposed publication. I think I should have gone on in any case, but I am glad that he does not disapprove, as it smooths the way. . . .

May 5.— . . . After the ladies left, I had a long talk with Arthur Balfour, who has adopted my view as to public works in Ireland and, as far as I can see, my view as to a great scheme of land purchase in Ireland for next session. Another instance of power without office.

May 24.—This morning and yesterday the papers are full of comments on what they call the Birmingham policy and Mr. Chamberlain's plan. . . . The Tory papers are rather uneasy—they wish I would let well alone. The Gladstonians pretend that it indicates a change, and, of course, are rather slighting about it; but they might easily be worse. John Morley told me that he could go and see Mr. Gladstone on his return from Ireland and talk the matter over, but I have no hope of anything good coming of it.

The public mind indeed soon forgot it. So little was he thanked for a piece of work to which he had given devoted labour. In the end it was worth while. At least as regards public works, the congested districts, land purchase and county government, this new "unauthorised programme" on the Irish Question was carried out in the next decade by the Unionists, to their historic credit, and thanks greatly to Arthur Balfour's perceptive and receptive statesmanship.

Chamberlain seldom threw more application into any task, nor looked more boldly towards a further goal. To reconcile his democratic and Imperial ideals and make them strengthen each other was now a purpose that his whole soul was in. He always thought that if the entire scheme, including provincial councils, had been taken up whole-heartedly by the other Unionist leaders at this time, it would have solved the Ulster question to begin with, and, leading to federation for the United Kingdom, would have made for that more distant and doubtful but supreme possibility, a federation of the Empire.

V

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

Simultaneously this indefatigable being was fighting another battle for Birmingham. He now won out once for all. For him it was no minor campaign and his political operations were like a model of military vigour. When he returned from America he found to his anger—not dismay—the whole Midland position in peril. Schnadhorst had remained until now a sort of subterranean power. “We never quite got him under”, his vanquisher used to say, “until 1888.” Chamberlain’s old lieutenant, William Harris, the father of the Caucus, had reverted to it. No longer was Dr. Dale a tower of strength. Disenchanted in politics, he would give no help.

The Gladstonians with clever tactics captured the old Liberal Association. By a concerted plan, Schnadhorst’s last ingenious exploit on that ground, they attended in numbers the meetings for electing the Ward Committees. In the large majority of the wards they carried their lists, and then changed the composition of the Divisional Councils—so that upon only one of these did the Radical Unionists retain a majority. The Gladstonians carried the “primaries” even in the Radical Unionist’s own division.

Chamberlain, single-handed at first, collected his forces and fell with smashing impact on this hollow success. The construction and direction of Caucuses were what he eminently understood. Within three weeks after his return from America he repudiated the Liberal Association, withdrew his adherents from it, created his own machine, and reduced the old one to final impotence as against him. His new instrument, the Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association, was completely organised throughout the city. Nothing but audacity could have done it, for at the outset some of his own lieutenants were loth to leave the old Caucus, dear to them for so many years. The Tory masses meanwhile were powerful and restive in the city. They wanted increased representation in Parliament, and they still hoped to make Lord Randolph a rival leader in Birmingham. To cope with them from Highbury, partly by management, partly by defiance, sometimes demanded all our Radical Unionist’s nerve and wits.

The relations between Chamberlain and Churchill became awkward and complicated. They were equally in favour of a National or Central party which might perhaps attract the more moderate of the Gladstonians. Both would have preferred a National Government under Lord Hartington. Failing this, both desired to propel Lord Salisbury's Ministry in a progressive direction. Upon the method of doing it they became more and more divided. Churchill was willing to assail the Cabinet in public and give delight to the enemy. Chamberlain notes:

My idea on the contrary was to confine all pressure to private representations, and, having gained all that was possible by this means, then to make the best of the situation in public. On the Land Bill, as well as on the proposal for the Parnell Commission, and again on the Land Purchase Bill, Randolph criticised severely the Government proposals and once or twice we came into some sort of collision. The project therefore of any close alliance came speedily to an end.¹

The two men thus fell into variance both on national and local affairs. As regards his city the Radical Unionist statesman could have no positive enthusiasm for the idea of two kings at Brentford, though he was not afraid of it. As Chamberlain and Balfour waxed, Randolph waned.

Officered and recruited by a large majority of the most active members of the old Caucus, the new Association with its big democratic Central Committee went ahead in numbers and funds and in success at local elections. How he remained master of his own ground after this rough reconquest is best told in his own words:

TO MISS ENDICOTT

March 20, 1888.— . . . I find that Gladstonians are much more malignant than when I went away. Hope deferred has turned to gall, and there is less chance of reconciliation than ever. Last night, at Birmingham, they secured a large majority of the Liberal Association at the primary elections even in my division. . . .

March 29.—Things are very mixed in Birmingham and will want much attention. The old organisation is lost to us. . . . The matter is urgent and more serious than I supposed and I shall devote my [Easter] holiday to making a start. . . . I propose to start an entirely new Associa-

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

tion with committees in each division and a grand committee for the whole of Birmingham, which must number some three thousand or four thousand. The local committees will conduct the election for the respective members, and will also elect representatives to form an Executive Committee of the Central Association. This, in time, will be affiliated to the National Radical Union, which will have branches throughout the whole country. . . . So much for the skeleton; it will take all I know to clothe it properly.

April 14.—I walked part of the way home [from a dinner at the Athenaeum] with Randolph Churchill, and discussed the situation in Birmingham. He was twice a candidate there, and was defeated. Now he is likely to stand again, probably with my support. We are obliged to draw closer the alliance with the Tories in the present situation, as the Gladstonians and Home Rulers have become the common enemy.

April 23.—My new organisation is going like wildfire. I will give my opponents a taste of my quality and teach them not to tread on my tails again. . . . I will see if I cannot kick every single Gladstonian out of the [Town] Council and replace them with good Unionists. . . .

May 8.—In Birmingham a [municipal] contest of much interest is going on. . . . A Conservative has offered for the vacancy, and is opposed by a Gladstonian with the whole strength of the old Liberal Association. . . . The difficulty is to get the rank and file to vote for a "Tory". . . . The issue is doubtful at present, and we are risking a good deal by thus burning our boats and throwing in our lot with the Conservatives.

May 13.—Last night the reports from the scene of action were bad, and I was afraid we should be beaten but we have knocked the enemy into a cocked hat and carried our man. . . . It will be a facer for the Gladstonians and a triumph for the family party, to which Austen has contributed by a very good speech.¹ . . . I shall not be satisfied until I have purged the Council of every single Gladstonian. *Je tiens ferme.* . . .

May 28.—[After an important meeting in the Town Hall when the "Unionist programme for Ireland" had excited much Conservative apprehension.] It was a good meeting, the great hall crowded, and the audience most enthusiastic. I was more nervous than I usually am owing

¹ His eldest son, Austen, then aged twenty-five, had become a few weeks before Liberal Unionist candidate for the Border Boroughs. "He is so attractive, so frank and so intelligent that

he is always a favourite wherever he goes, and I have great hopes that he will succeed" (Chamberlain to Miss Endicott, April 10, 1888).

to the strain beforehand, and also to the fact that the situation was really a very difficult and critical one.

CHAP.
XXXVII.
Æt. 52-53.

So the toil goes on from waking into the small hours of next day; his political correspondence an intolerable slavery, the part of his burthen always most detested; and yet his long letters to his betrothed he wrote after midnight. The strain told on him heavily, but, looking back on the battle for Birmingham and a throng of undertakings, he had as much reason for satisfaction as need for rest.

TO MISS ENDICOTT

June 25, 12 P.M.—Looking back on the last four months I am really surprised at myself and what I have done. I have reorganized Birmingham, produced a whole scheme of Irish policy, made half a dozen big speeches, and helped to work the Committee on Trade. That is a good deal more than I expected to do when I left you. Now I fancy I have come to the end of my tether and except under extraordinary pressure I can do no more.

June 16.—[In a fit of depression he borrows, and often uses afterwards, a mournful word of the Emperor Frederick who had just passed away.] Yesterday the news came of the death of the German Emperor. It is a most tragic thing, and the details of his suffering and bravery too are tragic. Very recently he is said to have told his son: *Lernen Sie zu leiden ohne zu klagen*—a lesson which someone else [himself] might take to heart.

“Suffer without complaining”—he had no need to learn it. It had been second nature to him for years. One crevice there was in his armour. Against attacks upon his political motives and upon his character—the very thing made dearest to him by his upbringing—he never acquired fortitude enough. But in that as in every other way to life’s end he was exempt from self-pity.

VI

To self-conscious reflection on himself and his processes he was not given, as we have noticed, but in the revealing correspondence of this year his remarks on the art of speech-making are of lasting interest. More than ever on the platform his

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

contrasting style counterpoised Gladstone's eloquence. If the old orator aroused enthusiasm, the younger man stirred both passion and resolve; nor less potent in his more practical way was his appeal to imagination. Popular audiences on the Unionist side preferred him far to any other man whatever, and he was besieged by requests.

At the same time, since his return from America he had risen at last in the House of Commons not only to equality with Gladstone himself in parliamentary debate proper, but to ascendancy. For testimony to this effect we have not only to depend on the evidence of a close journalistic witness not too friendly at this time. The late Sir Henry Lucy remarked of Chamberlain during this session:

To see him at his very best is to watch him in the House of Commons in these days when he stands with his back to the wall engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with his former comrades. Mr. Gladstone in the full swing of his oratory is often disconcerted by hostile interruption, and is too easily led astray into devious paths. The fiercer the attack on Mr. Chamberlain, the more noisy the interruption, the brighter and cooler he grows, warding off bludgeon blows with deft parrying of his rapier, swiftly followed up by telling thrust at the aggressor. A dangerous man to tackle even with the advantage of overwhelming numbers—one whom it would not be safe to count as beaten, however distressing circumstances concerning him may at a given moment seem to be.¹

This tribute is convincing enough, but we have higher authority. Speaker Peel often said that in all his own long memory of the House of Commons, the most expert and dreaded combatant who ever sat there, not at all excepting Mr. Gladstone, was Chamberlain—"the best speaker next to Mr. Gladstone and the best debater with no exception". Stripped of adornment in encounter, he relied on economy of means against the august veteran's superabundance. His skill with sword and shield alike against all comers; his sinewy agility, especially his footwork as moderns would say; his lynx-like vigilance turning to instant account the least slip of an opponent—these long-trained faculties, exercised now and henceforth with an ease he had not

¹ Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Salisbury Parliament, 1886-1892*, p. 147.

possessed before, made him the gladiator whom none could overthrow. CHAP.
XXXVII.

For Mr. Gladstone his reverence was unbounded. On June 26 Æt. 52-53 he writes to Miss Endicott:

I went to the House to-day and heard Mr. Gladstone's speech; in argument it was thin and ineffective, but as a specimen of eloquence and debating skill it really was wonderful. It is extraordinary to what a pitch of perfection the old man has brought himself as a talking machine.

But not in the least imitating what he admired, the younger, cooler athlete perfected a surer art of combat; and we may say rendered obsolete the old school of arms. For sheer immediate efficiency in debate as debate—wherewith philosophical values have little or nothing to do—Chamberlain possibly never has been matched. One characteristic touch of that quality had delighted Canada:

Question.—Do you think the English people would favour any proposal from Canada discriminating in favour of the United States?

Answer.—CHAMBERLAIN: Well, how do you think the Canadian people would favour any proposal in England discriminating between Canada and the United States? I think human nature is the same on both sides of the water. Your answer would probably be mine.¹

Let him explain for himself how he arrived at this height:

TO MISS ENDICOTT

May 20, 1888.—*From Sir William Harcourt's seat, Malwood.*—We (the men) have since been chatting in the smoke-room and discussing the history of leading speakers and their method of preparation. As far as I know all successful speakers are very nervous and greatly strained before speaking; when on their legs the feeling disappears, but the period of gestation is one of great pain and anxiety. I suffered like every one else when I first began—I was miserable for a month in advance. Now I generally do not begin to prepare till one, or at most two, days beforehand, and I think I am not intolerable to my family during this period, although I am more or less absorbed. Bright used to be terribly fidgetty and cross; Disraeli would speak to no one; and Gladstone is difficult to

¹ Sir Willoughby Maycock, *With and Canada*, pp. 94-95 (conversation Mr. Chamberlain in the United States with Canadian journalists).

BOOK approach for a day beforehand. Harcourt and Morley are both much
 VIII. strained. Under these circumstances who would be the wife of a public
 1888-89. man? ¹

May 27.—I have to make a speech to-morrow and dread it. It is a difficult occasion. . . . (*Later*)—I have been slaving away for some hours and have just finished my notes. . . . I have satisfied myself fairly, and I have come to bid you good-night before going to work again to elaborate what I have done and prepare myself for its delivery. The making of a speech is like the making of a book, or the painting of a picture, or any other work of the imagination. It is a great strain and effort, and no good result has ever been achieved without both. I am glad to say that the burthen has been less of late years. When I first began I had a speech on my mind for a month beforehand; then for a long time I allowed a week, then three days; now I generally put it off till one day before delivery. This is a good thing, for a man with an undelivered speech in his head is not an agreeable companion,² but the ordinary notion of the uninstructed public appears to be that we speakers pour forth our thoughts in a spontaneous burst of eloquence which involves no preparation and no labour. The contrary is the fact, and I know of no work comparable in intensity of application and mental absorption to the preparation of a speech—of course, the strain differs with the subject, the occasion and the health and temper of the speaker.

September 22.—We often have to deliver ourselves impromptu, and sometimes make better speeches this way than when they are carefully thought out, but it does not do to rely on this.

In this case, as usual, acquired genius was the blend of dual elements. By itself, the infinite capacity for taking pains never can raise an innately dull or mediocre nature to the effects of genius. To begin with, the man must have the capacity for vivid conception; and then, to achieve form with significance, must combine concentrated imagination with arduous endurance.

¹ Because of an attack by his host upon Jesse Collings and the Rural Labourers League, Chamberlain, just before this visit to Malwood, called Harcourt the Dugald Dalgetty of politics, and the name stuck; but though these two sometimes thumped each other like schoolboys there was

no bad blood between them.

² Afterwards, Mrs. Chamberlain once wrote about him to her mother that he had returned from the House without having found the opportunity to speak, suffering from a *discours rentré*.

Burke is an example. Some rare spirits in every art have seemed to combine matchless ease with sovereign felicity and power. But we do not know. Before the point of rapid execution their inward travail of preparation may have been extreme. CHAP.
XXXVII.
Æt. 52-53.

VII

The examples of his own art were notable enough at this period, but we cannot revive many echoes. To one utterance, his address to the London Chamber of Commerce in May upon the "Maintenance of British Interests in South Africa", we shall have to return at a point in his career which he could not yet anticipate. His distinctive intervention in the affair of the Parnell Commission is part of that extreme tragedy which must have a chapter to itself.

In the autumn, by the ironical turn of circumstance he addressed a mass meeting at Bradford, Forster's old constituency, and made handsome amends to that statesman's memory.¹ In Irish eyes the Radical Unionist was now what "Buckshot" had once been, the inheritor of hate, and this he requited the following week at another mass meeting in Nottingham.² There he marred a strong effort by a savage stroke. Defending coercion out and out—force against force in this political war—he said: "The influence of Mr. Parnell at the present moment depends wholly upon the fact that he is the channel through which flow for the support of the Irish party the subscriptions from the servant girls of America. The Irish patriotic party is a *Kept Party*"—a fling never forgiven nor deserving forgiveness.

This, with the Conservative leader's "Hottentots" speech, and the Irish cries of "Judas Chamberlain" and "bloody Balfour", was amongst the worst things in that period of garish recrimination. When he made that reference, he had in his possession a list—supplied by a former Irish member—of the salaries or allowances paid to most of Parnell's parliamentary followers. But he ignored the sacrifice of time and talent, opportunity and life, that the ablest of these men were making for the sake of an ideal. Their stipends were only a voluntary form of payment of mem-

¹ Bradford, September 19.

² Nottingham, September 26.

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

bers. In the Liberal and Conservative parties assistance to needy but useful politicians was by no means unknown. The American servant girls' mites devoted to a cause were no more disgraceful than large contributions by rich brewers and other affluent persons to the funds of the Unionist party. After this, though Irish abuse had been most to blame at the outset, he deserved evidently all he got from that side. One of his defects, perhaps the most serious, was that in the private as in the public quarrels of politics he slipped too often into these scarifying phrases of contemptuous travesty. "Certainly," says Bacon, "he that hath a satirical vein, as he maketh others afraid of his wit, so he had need be afraid of others' memory."

In extenuation let it be said that there was a special reason for this scarifying outburst. A few weeks before, the American Senate, by a strict party vote, had rejected the Fisheries Treaty—thirty Republicans for it, twenty-seven Democrats against. Attributing this result to the malignancy of the Irish-Americans he returned the blow as he returned every blow. We have seen that no substantial harm was done as between Washington and Ottawa. He was assured from the United States and Canada that his *modus vivendi* was working admirably, as afterwards it continued.

It is time to finish the political story of this year, when he ceased to think Liberal reunion feasible and instead gave his mind to Unionist consolidation. The Gladstonians, as at Ayr, were still winning the by-elections in spite of all he could do; and every seat lost by Liberal Unionism he felt like the loss of a tooth. With Gladstone's prolonged vitality and emotional sway he had not reckoned when the conflict began. The battle was longer far than he anticipated when Home Rule was thrown out in June 1886 by the casting vote of his group. That battle, he now thought, would prove still sterner and prove adverse, unless Tories and Whigs could be spurred into progressive courses. He had been without any real holiday for two years and his work had been enough to break him. He was sometimes tired to death. These autumn speeches, trenchant swordsmanship as they were, he made against the grain. When the last public engagement was fulfilled at Nottingham he drew a long breath of relief for the best of private reasons.

VIII

The time of protracted waiting for his marriage was drawing to a close. Not to see for nearly nine months after first engagement the woman to whom one is plighted might well seem to any man the worst kind of eternity. It is pleasant to turn to his personal life and thoughts. Constantly caricatured by Liberals at this time as Jack Cade tamed by duchesses, he is indeed much in the high world, not because he always likes it for himself at present, but because he hopes to like it twice as much when his life is shared again. Let him give his own glimpses:

CHAP.
XXXVII.
Æt. 52-53.

TO MISS ENDICOTT

April 16, 1888.—I cannot help contrasting the spirit in which I now go into society with what it was formerly. Then it was a distraction and amusement and helped to fill my time, but it had no relation to anything else. Now it is all in reference to you. I catch myself continually thinking, how would she like this. . . . On Saturday night I sent an invitation to Matthew Arnold¹ to dine with me. To-day he died suddenly of *angina pectoris*. I knew him well and am sorry that he has gone, though the manner of his death is what I should like for myself—no long illness, no great anxiety of friends, no weakness of the faculties—but in a moment he is gone and now knows what is to be known of the eternal mystery. . . .

May 18.—In the course of dinner [at Prince's Gardens] I had to interfere to moderate a dispute between Bright and Browning, which was turning to acerbity, Bright taking the view of that lunatic Donnelly that Shakespeare's plays were written by Bacon. It was funny to see how cross the disputants got over this literary question. . . .

May 19.—*From Malwood.*— . . . The conversation was lively and amusing. I developed an old idea of mine that the British public was obsessed with the idea that every man who lived in public life beyond the scriptural age of three score and ten was . . . so meritorious as to entitle him to unlimited confidence and trust; and that the nearer he approached to his dotage and total incapacity the more unbounded was the reliance on his powers. Therefore I had made up my mind to be Prime Minister at one hundred, when, no doubt, I should be a drivelling idiot but when a nod of my head would influence the world. . . .

¹ Matthew Arnold thought Chamberlain "the man with a future".

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

June 26.—*From Waddesdon*.—This afternoon I came down here. "Here" is the country seat of Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild, the richest of all the family . . . a perfectly unique place. It is built in imitation of a French chateau of the Renaissance. The site was originally a hill with open views in all directions, but money has removed the top of the hill. . . . There are terraces and statues and fountains . . . the most beautiful furniture, a priceless selection of exquisite china and some splendid pictures. There is a great deal of liberty in these big parties. . . . I had a delightful talk with Arthur Balfour—about Froude—literature—Voltaire—the art of writing—history—Burke—the French Revolution, etc., etc., and now I am alone in my room trying, imperfectly enough I know, to give you some impressions of this luxurious society which, though certainly not the end of things, is full of a certain charm and not altogether unprofitable. Every man and woman here is in some way gifted above the average, and though for the main part they do not go very deep, they make life for the time very ornamental and recreative. . . . It is a perfectly unreal existence that I am living with all my interests so far away. . . .

He writes, too, about books, flowers, astronomy, shopping; about rearrangements and improvements at Highbury and the London house. Is not Thackeray, he asks, the chief of novelists? *The English Humourists* has most influence on Chamberlain's mature style, not *Junius* as frequently but absurdly suggested. Thackeray's heroines are no doubt too sentimentalised, he admits, yet all is best when a woman clings to a man. Hence he thinks that "immense tenderness" is what raises love above friendship. This is not the last word in some modern views, both hard and subtle, but *Cymbeline* says the same:

. . . Hang there like fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die.

Carlyle's *French Revolution* may be inaccurate in detail, but as giving life to the event and more life to the reader, is it not wonderful? His old friend's *Voltaire* he can read again and again. What a pity that Morley has left the sphere where he might have shone still higher for a sphere where he never can pre-dominate.¹ The Russian novelists are extraordinary, no doubt,

¹ Chamberlain's opinion that Morley might have left a greater name if he had not gone into politics was shared in the end by Gladstone. "He (Mr. G.)

but he refuses to read them. Life is trying enough, and they are an additional depression. Better to read what enhances vitality than what lowers it.

CHAP.
XXXVII.
Æt. 52-53.

So he goes on through reams and reams. She loves roses, so, as we see, he is creating a large rose-house for her coming; and in other ways spends his money at a sanguine rate, and, conscious of the extravagance, has as much pleasure in it as a schoolboy breaking bounds. This man so often called prosaic was in fact impelled by imagination all his life—even a Caucus takes some imagining, like a steam hammer or a sonnet. He describes at length, repeatedly, the curious figures and surprising manners of new orchids. Desiring to know more about the New England of Miss Endicott's early ancestors, he goes back to Cotton Mather and the most terrible superstition of Puritanism; enters into a study of witchcraft and witch-hunting; and passes with zest to what had always been of peculiar interest to him—ghost lore in general. The later Maupassant as in *Le Horla*—its ghoulish pages were then recent—may be horrifying to normal beings, but does it not touch something in the mysteries of human apprehension?

TO MISS ENDICOTT

April 18, 1888.—Above all I hope that you will be pleased with your new home when you come to take possession of it. It has quite a new interest for me now that I constantly connect it with you and see you in imagination in every room.

April 20.—I never saw the child yet that I could not get on with, and I think I must have it from my father who was especially tender with children and touched by their hopes and sorrows.

April 22.—After dinner I got down one of the farces I wrote a long time ago and read it to the family, who proved a most indulgent audience. Then Neville played to us a *lied* of Mendelssohn's and part of a Sonata by Beethoven.

June 1.—Did I tell you that I have arranged a rose-house for you at Highbury? It is to be sixty feet long and on the best and latest model, but I fear we shall never equal the American roses, as our winter has

had tried to persuade John Morley not to return to political life for which he was not naturally fitted" (*Private* *Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, p. 334, January 27, 1897).

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

so little sunshine by comparison. Still we will try and grow the American Beauties to remind you of the country you have given up for me.

June 28.—Take my advice and never marry a politician, but you may marry a horticulturist—a grower of orchids, for instance. . . .

June 29.—Would you like to know something more about the stars? See if you can get a book, *The Heavens*, by Amédée Guillemin. It is illustrated in an intelligible and interesting form. . . . I think that the German Emperor in the short months of his reign was able to make provision for his wife and to lay the foundation of a stable policy for his country. Therefore his suffering was not without compensation, and certainly it enabled him to set a noble example to mankind. Did I tell you that the police here [London] are very confident that for the moment there is no chance of outrage, and have consequently taken off the guard of detectives by whom I was constantly surrounded for the last two or three years? . . . It makes me furious to think that the Wests are going back [to Washington] on the 7th and I am here.

July 10.—Do you remember that droll scene in *The Rivals* where Falkland rebukes Julia with her high spirits in his absence and begs an assurance that she was not really mirthful? She might have been “temperately healthy and sometimes plaintively gay!” Surely that is one of the cleverest plays ever written, but I hope Falkland was well henpecked after marriage.

July 21.—I went out to get a little fresh air. On my way I turned into a shop and bought a little blue china, etc., for the decoration of Highbury. I am just like a woman in this; it is a relief to my mind to buy something.

August 11.—Went to the theatre to see—what do you think? *Joseph’s Sweetheart*. I am sorry to say that it was very stupid and we left after the third act. The piece is based on a novel of Fielding’s, *Joseph Andrews*.

And more about books he is reading and wants her to read—Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon* and Bulwer Lytton’s *Coming Race*. Pages and pages about them. Hardly a tithe of it all is indicated here. Does any correspondence across an ocean contain fuller talk of its kind?

IX

We come to inmost notes of personality. We have seen for years the stoic in him masking pain with a full human

capacity for feeling it. Like those who never part from the photograph of the dead, yet never look at it because of immitigable regret, he has tried to avert his thought from memories that yet will not depart. Now at last he can look back with deliberate calmness, believing in a law of compensation:

CHAP.
XXXVII.
Æt. 52-53.

TO MISS ENDICOTT

July 8, 1888.—This is my birthday, and it is natural that I should go back to last year and dwell on the changes made in my life. . . . How much I owe you. Then I was much harder, striving to steel myself and to play the game of life till the cards fell from my hands and caring little how soon that time came. Now, all this artificial insensibility is broken down: my youth has come back to me. . . .

July 17.—I hope that you will keep me to my work. Sometimes I feel as if I should like to give up my public life and devote myself to you, but it would not be right or wise, and, if you find me inclined to give myself entirely to the new happiness of my life, you must recall me to a sense of duty and you must *order* me back to the battlefield. . . . It is extraordinary how civil I am to every American—and all because they are countrymen of somebody!

August 9.— . . . It is odd how a small thing influences one's life and character. When I was a very young man an uncle gave me a ring with the crest. I wanted a motto for it, and as there was none which the family claimed, I invented that which we all now bear: *Je tiens ferme*. It has often stood me in good stead, and I have often steadied myself by suddenly repeating this motto.

He plans to spend a holiday in London that he may be a better cicerone for "somebody" in the near time. He visits the great national collections with the best assistance of their expert guardians:

July 22.—I also want to go to Camberwell where I was born, to Highbury where my boyhood was passed, and to Highgate and Hampstead where I have reminiscences. I have never visited these places because I have been either too much occupied, or else, when I have had spare time, all the happiness of my life has been behind me, and I have decided not to risk recalling it to memory after the reality has passed, whereas now I can affront the past without fear.

So it was done. He and his son Austen went through London

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

together as one goes through Paris when on a long early visit and found it as attractive. The British Museum—the South Kensington collections—the National Gallery—Dulwich Gallery—Kew Gardens—he sees them all with a sense of surprise and discovery, looking in a new way at things formerly taken for granted. He explores London City where his ancestors had dwelt for generations. He visits in Milk Street the old house of his fathers, finding it much rebuilt. In an open carriage and pair he takes again the road—once, for two years, as familiar as anything in the routine of his life—from University College School to Highbury Place;¹ and though so much is changed, recognitions throng at every step. He rings the bell at his earlier school in Canonbury Square and finds that his old master, the Reverend Arthur Johnson of the Church of England, “to whom I owe much”, has been dead these long years; but Mrs. Johnson, still alive and vivacious at eighty-two, well remembers him out of countless troops of little boys.

At last he drove to Camberwell where he was born, but had not seen for over forty years. He had some difficulty in identifying the house. A child’s pleasure in two cherry trees in blossom was what he best recollected. The trees were gone from the garden, but the resident knew they had once been there and showed the stumps. It was the house. Particularly there was “a little back room looking on to the garden and that I knew to be the room where I used to play”.² All this was a softening but good experience. What he says to Miss Endicott at the end of one of these days is typical of his feeling through the rest:

August 11.—I owe it to you since without you I should never have had the experience. . . . I have not done this before because with no future to look forward to I did not care to awaken the past. Now it is altogether different.

It was wonderfully like him that before his coming marriage, he put his memories and thoughts in order like his masses of old papers sorted at this time. The past thus put in its place, as it were, was to have respect and affection but no more power to darken. His letters become both graver and more assuredly serene as the year of waiting draws now towards an end:

¹ August 11, 1888.

² August 14, 1888.

TO MISS ENDICOTT

September 23, 1888.—I do wish that I had got this Nottingham business out of hand [his last public engagement before re-crossing the Atlantic], and then I could give myself up entirely to the thought of the future for, like you, I am changed. How much even you can hardly tell. I look back on the last thirteen years almost as a bad dream, and yet during that time everything has gone well with me, so that outsiders might think me the happiest man in the world. In that comparatively short space my fortune has doubled or trebled, and I have had every comfort that money could give; my public life has been one of striking success; and my political influence and reputation have grown constantly. Meanwhile, my children have been all that the most exacting father could desire; my tastes, my ambition and my affections have all been gratified; and yet, in spite of all this, I have been so lonely, there has never been a time when I would not have accepted a sentence of death as a relief. . . . You have made life once more a glorious and a hopeful thing.

CHAP.
XXXVII.
Æt. 52-53.

September 24.—The sense of what I have gained grows on me.

October 30.—There is something strange and almost solemn in the thought that this long correspondence, which has occupied us both so much and has had such entrancing interest for us, is really coming to an end.

October 31.—I have just finished the last of your letters and am hoping for the writer. I wish I wrote as well as you do.

The secret had been hitherto well guarded, but a couple of days afterwards he prepared the editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post* to explain his absence from the autumn session:

When this letter is brought to you I hope I may be half-way across the Atlantic to carry out a second and private treaty which I negotiated when last in America and which fortunately does not require the ratification of the Senate. I am engaged to be married to Miss Mary Endicott, the only daughter of the American Secretary of War. . . . I expect to return before Christmas and hope afterwards to take my full part in public work. . . . I know that as always I shall have your best wishes in connection with this new light that has come into my life.¹

¹ Chamberlain to J. T. Bunce, November 2, 1888.

X

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

Two months before this, he had booked his passage in the name of Willoughby Maycock, his clever and amusing Assistant Secretary on the Fisheries Commission, who revelled in the plot. The statesman contrived to slip from Highbury to Liverpool and into his cabin without being recognised by anyone, nor was his presence discovered on the crossing.¹ The *Aurania* sailed from the Mersey on November 3, and took nine days for the voyage, so that before he reached New York on the twelfth the presidential contest was over. Grover Cleveland's administration was overturned. The Irish vote had done its worst to that end; not at all knowing how diverting and excruciating had been the power of its suspensory veto over the matrimonial plans of the Englishman who was its ogre. He quitted the ship as adroitly as he embarked. The *New York World* said:

His leaving the vessel by the ladder was a dangerous attempt as the *Aurania* was moving, and the steps kept swaying backward and forward, threatening to throw the athletic lover into the river or to be ground between the pier and the steamship. He managed to get down safely and the crowd gave him a hearty cheer. He lifted his hat, waved a farewell and tripped away with a step as brisk and light as though twenty years had been deducted from his age.²

Three days after, in St. John's Church, Washington—an old-fashioned ivy-clad building standing on the other side of the park in front of the White House—he was quietly married to Miss Endicott by Dr. Leonard, afterwards Bishop of Ohio, and the Rev. J. P. Franks, who represented Grace Church, Salem, and the long New England tradition of the bride's family. President Cleveland and most of the Cabinet were present, while American officers in full uniform attended to honour Miss Endicott's father, their Secretary of War. The Washington journals related in effect that the wedding was astonishingly like what any intelligent person might suppose in the circumstances; that the bride wore a grey travelling dress; that the bridegroom, wearing, at her wish, white violets on his black coat, was radiant

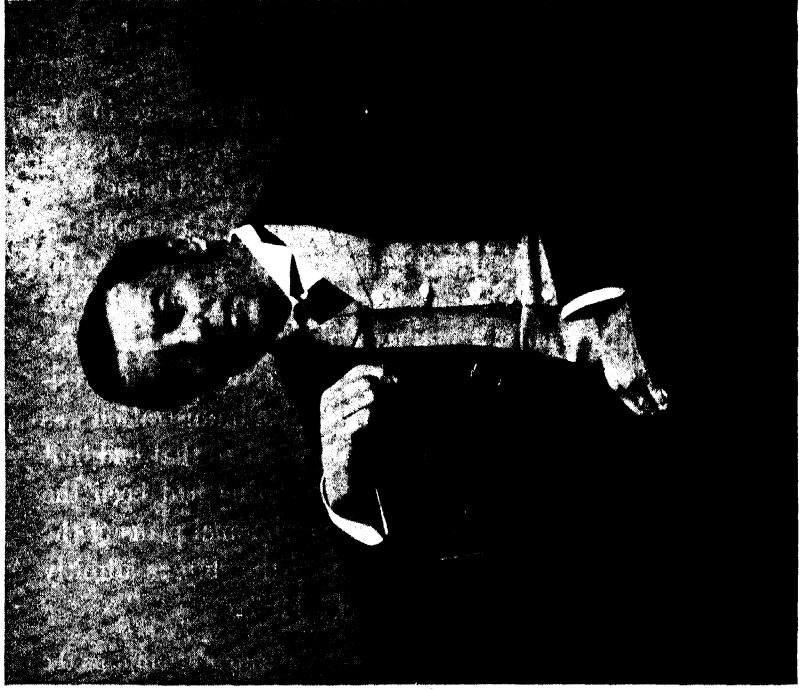
¹ Sir Willoughby Maycock, *With Mr. Chamberlain in the United States and Canada*, p. 241.

² *Ibid.* p. 244.



John Collier, Birmingham

MARY C. ENDICOTT



Photo

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

Elliott & Fry

At the time of their marriage in 1888

without disguise; that the American President at the Endicotts' house proposed the proper toast; that in reply England's "man with a future" struggled well with feeling.

CHAP.
XXXVII.
Æt. 52-53.

Plans for a visit to the West Indies were upset by an outbreak of yellow fever in South Carolina, through which their route led. At the beginning of December they reached Paris and went on to the Riviera. Political correspondence, and a surfeit of it, pursued him even to San Remo.

To Christmas he looked forward as he had not done for many a year, and he longed to spend it at Highbury. Very quietly on Christmas Eve he brought his wife home, and perhaps never knew a happier moment. A public welcome had been escaped with difficulty, but Birmingham was determined to have satisfaction.

On January 8, 1889, a great civic festival celebrated his New Year and new life. Already old friends and recent friends in national politics had rivalled each other in generous felicitations. In Birmingham strife was stilled; all parties and classes joined to make the reception very human, yet full of civic state. The Town Hall, cockpit of political battle, might look gaunt in its other winters, but now with flags and flowers the organising citizens turned it into a big drawing-room, as they said. When young Mrs. Chamberlain appeared on her husband's arm she won their hearts for good. The assembly was persuaded that there was a new beginning in Birmingham, and they were right. Mr. C. E. Mathews, gifted and devoted friend, had been the life and soul of all these arrangements. When he exerted himself on an occasion good enough his happiness of expression could not be excelled in London or anywhere, for he was a highly civilised man. He delivered the speech leading up to the presentation of an illuminated address to the bridegroom and a fine case of pearls to the bride.

Sir, we welcome the man who for many years has so closely identified himself with the public and the private life of Birmingham, who has served in his own person every honourable office and has endeared himself to thousands of our people by numberless instances of thoughtfulness, generosity and goodwill. . . . Madam, you have not come amongst strangers. . . . "Dear lady, welcome home."

BOOK
VIII.
1888-89.

To the good human touch of these proceedings, the statesman responded for his wife and himself. For his wife: "I know that she is prepared to take up her life amongst us, in the country to which she has come, in all its fulness and that she will say like Ruth of old, 'Thy people shall be my people'". For himself: "I have always had behind me the support and the encouragement and the sympathy of my own people, who know me best, who have made me what I am, and whose support has never failed".

XI

He found himself fortunate above his hopes, and his belief in his luck, his star, was brighter than it had been since the early summer of 1885, three and a half years past—before Dilke's calamity, the breach with Parnell, the Home Rule crisis, and Liberal disruption. Sharing all his interests, adding grace to his platforms, Mrs. Chamberlain became the lady of Birmingham. As for London society, its verdict was pronounced by one of its lawgivers, Lady Dorothy Nevill, not before prepossessed in favour of American brides: "No one ever had a more perfect wife than he. . . . She is the most charming woman imaginable." At first meeting, Queen Victoria entered in her journal, "Mrs. Chamberlain is very pretty and young-looking and is very lady-like with a nice frank open manner".¹ Half a decade afterwards Her Majesty remarked, "Mrs. Chamberlain looked lovely and was as charming as ever".²

The family problem might not have seemed easy but it solved itself. From the first, Chamberlain had been solicitous that the happiness of his children should harmonise with the happiness of his wife. The elder son and daughter were of her own age. Beatrice had been her father's right hand in the household, and this daughter entered with an acumen like his own into all his political interests. Austen, whom he hopes to see in Parliament before long, had made, we have seen, his promising debut as a candidate, and was his father's aide-de-camp. Neville, near his twentieth year, was to be dedicated to business, not politics.

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. i. p. 498 (April 30, 1889).

² *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 378 (March 8, 1894).

Ida, Hilda and Ethel would all be out of their teens before very long.

They all accepted his choice without question, and took her to their own hearts. This is a rare tribute to the strength of the ties between Chamberlain and his children through the former years. In their sight he was everything. For his part he had been a devoted father but a strict; handing on the discipline wherein he himself was bred. They were to tell the truth always. He exacted and received instant obedience. When they had done at once what they were told they might ask why afterwards, but not before. Again, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might". It is not enough to say that they loved him. Stauncher love could not be. Nor is it true that they were also a little afraid of him. But some awe they had felt; and part of his own nature had remained shut up. Now, as one of his children wrote long afterwards of the newcomer, "She unlocked his heart, and we were able to enter in as never before". Amongst his own praises of his American wife was the best human word he ever found: "She brought my children nearer to me".

CHAP.
XXXVII
ÆT. 52-53.

BOOK IX

1885—1892

CHAPTER XXXVIII

PARNELL'S RUIN: CHAMBERLAIN'S ASCENT

(1885-1891)

THE True Account of Parnell's Ruin—O'Shea's Letters, 1885-92—His Hopes in Chamberlain and Political Disappointments—What might have been—Rage against Parnell from 1886—Belief in the Pigott Forgeries—Chamberlain and the Parnell Commission—O'Shea in Madrid: A Last Glimpse of Pigott—"Old Mrs. Wood" and the Disputed Will—An End of Great Expectations—O'Shea's Revelations to Chamberlain—Shall Parnell Triumph?—Figaro as Destroyer—The First Hints of Vengeance—"He who smashes Parnell smashes Parnellism"—The Divorce Case—Destruction of a Cause—Chamberlain and the Sequel.

I

AFTER the home-coming Chamberlain resumed active politics early in 1889. A few weeks later the Parnell Commission, emerging from months of boredom, suddenly moved to a notorious climax; and this again set in train a darker series of events. We must follow from a new point of view a tangled tale imperfectly known till now. More involved than he ever suspected in the relations between Parnell and O'Shea, yet the chief recipient of the latter's confidences, Chamberlain despite himself was deeply concerned in an affair mingling every element of tragic fantasy like no other in modern history and like few at any time.

Reaching Havre in early December 1888, a statesman on his wedding tour, he found waiting for him there a letter which must have made him open his eyes. It was from O'Shea, and intimated the coming addition of new ingredients to a witches' brew already thick and seething. The Captain hints at the possibility of a destroying divorce case—in unexpected connection

CHAP.
XXXVIII
ÆT. 49-55

BOOK
IX.

1885-91.

with a struggle over the will of a very rich and very old lady who may die any day.

It has been whispered often that Chamberlain was a prime mover in Parnell's fall and secretly paid the expenses. In neither part of that suggestion is there a particle of truth. But to understand the boding situation we have arrived at, and the ruinous sequel, we must rapidly summarise some antecedents. The mystery of Captain O'Shea's mind between 1881 and 1886 never can be elucidated with final certainty. The theme is a commonplace of fiction, though fiction seems itself commonplace beside this extravagance of reality. On widely different theories several novels might be founded. Private injury and vengeance; money and vanity; intrigue and ambition—all these mingle with political conflict on the historic scale. A consecutive narrative with its documentation will show the interplay of major and lesser motives.

II

In the spring of 1881, some of Parnell's colleagues waiting for him in Paris and distracted by his delay, opened his letters and discovered a former humble *liaison*, but it was no longer the true clue.¹ O'Shea's own suspicions a few months later were excited and he challenged Parnell to a duel, sending the message by that fire-eating patriarch, the O'Gorman Mahon, still as ready in these matters as Colonel Bath or Captain MacTurk.² The quarrel was so fully appeased that the mollified husband, bearing himself henceforth as the accredited confidant of his supplanter, negotiated with Chamberlain the Kilmainham treaty and Parnell's release.

Those events had two consequences. Figaro, who never made light of his own importance, held that he placed the uncrowned king under an everlasting obligation. On the other hand, familiar use of Chamberlain's name became the other half of O'Shea's political stock-in-trade. His letters to his wife are full of his intimacy with the Radical whom he regards as the coming leader in England. He knew that she dealt directly on occasion with Gladstone and with the Chief Whip, Lord Richard

¹ T. M. Healy, *Letters and Leaders of my Day*, vol. i. pp. 107, 110.

² Mrs. O'Shea, *Parnell*, vol. i. pp. 189, 190.

Grosvenor.¹ He might well feel that an aura of unofficial influence belonged to him, and that position would ensue. After Kilmainham, the idea of negotiating another and greater "Treaty" never left him. When he thought he almost had it in his pocket—when the prospect for an Irish National Council looked brightest in May and June 1885—his personal hopes soared to what were for him the stars.

CHAP.
XXXVIII.
ÆT. 49-55.

May 4, 1885.—If Chamberlain has power, which I think he will in the next Parliament, he will offer me the Chief Secretaryship—or the equivalent position, if the name is abolished—if the boys will let me have it. Gladstone ought not to know this.²

Undated, probably early June 1885.—To-day C. promised me the Chief Secretaryship. . . . This is an enormous thing, giving you and the chicks a very great position.³

But the attacks in *United Ireland* began. Parnell, in hope of manipulating the Conservatives, threw over Chamberlain and Dilke—in spite of the risks they had run—and National Councils and all. The emissary's vision of high office vanished like Al-naschar's day-dreams of making his fortune as a merchant in glass. Pecuniarily dependent on his wife, his financial difficulties were harassing. He suffered pangs in his own way. When he came to the end of his function and foible as an important intermediary in politics—and "with hopes" as the Ireland of that day used to say in a peculiar sense—his suave nature received a festering wound. For the motive of vengeance he had every cause that drama can conceive.

End June, 1885.—He [Parnell] has not told the lie to my face, but the man who, after promising to assist in every way Mr. Chamberlain's journey to Ireland, can let his paper the same week abuse him like a pickpocket, is not to be respected by Mr. C. and I have already told the scoundrel what I think of him. The worst of it is that one looks such a fool getting Mr. C. to write such a letter as that of Saturday to no purpose. . . . I wonder whether I shall die soon, or if the day will come. Would I had understood it had come when I was asked to go to Kilmainham.⁴

The Captain's inclinations after this went with his aspiration

¹ Lord Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, p. 296.

² Mrs. O'Shea, *Parnell*, vol. ii. p. 209.

³ *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 205, 206.

⁴ *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 212, 213.

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

and his enmity. To Chamberlain he became beyond question as devoted as his facile type of nature allowed. After his fiasco as an emissary in his most grandiose negotiation—for an Irish National Council—his inmost feeling towards Parnell is one of raging hatred biding its time. Stultified and frustrated, he has to stifle his longing to strike. For various reasons, political and private, he could not at once attack without undoing himself, as well as ruining every prospect of moderate Home Rule which in his own way he genuinely desired.

A surprising change of mood soon occurred. He turned menacing and for a new reason. It is not always safe to make a smooth man desperate. Circumstances made him desperate. We have seen part of it. To keep a seat in the House of Commons was everything to him at that phase. In advance of the Irish elections of 1885, his candidature was thrown out in County Clare. He would not take the iron pledge binding every member of the Parnellite phalanx to sit and vote with the rest. He would not be Parnell's man. He meant to remain Chamberlain's man. The dictator himself durst not patronise the Captain on these terms. There were suggestions that as an Irish Liberal he might find a seat in Ulster. This resort turned out derisory when he applied. Then suppressed hate broke out in the scene at Morrison's Hotel in Dublin, when with execrations the candidate, whom nobody wanted in Ireland, drove Parnell out of the room. His menaces are full-charged.

Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, November 2, 1885.—DEAR KATE—The doctor cannot tell me when I may hope to leave this wretched place. . . . I shall stay a night at Chamberlain's on my way back. . . . All I know is that I am not going to lie in the ditch. I have been treated in blackguard fashion, and I mean to hit back a stunner. I have everything ready; no drugs could make me sleep last night, and I packed my shell with dynamite. It cannot hurt my friend [Chamberlain] and it will send a blackguard's reputation with his deluded countrymen into smithereens. . . .¹

O'Shea appeals to Highbury to find him at the last moment an English constituency. Too late. "C. [Chamberlain] thought nothing left in England except forlorn hopes."²

¹ Mrs. O'Shea, *Parnell*, vol. ii. p. 90.

² *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 91.

His wife now exerted all her audacious resources to get him adopted as candidate for a peculiar constituency in Liverpool—the Exchange Division, which was nearly half Irish. She badgers the Liberal Chief Whip and Gladstone himself to authorise O'Shea. She succeeds. But this cannot be enough. Parnell must drink his first cup of public humiliation, and drains it with a steady hand. He must go down to Liverpool “to ensure Willie's candidature without appearing to do so”.¹ Parnell puts up his own pretended candidature for the Exchange Division, and then withdraws in O'Shea's favour. But the latter is beaten by a hair's-breadth.² This is fatal. Remember that O'Shea without a seat loses his basis in the city as well as in Parliament, just at the time when he expects to play his crowning part as intermediary in the coming Home Rule question. He must force his wife and Parnell to put him into the House of Commons. How to do it is their affair.

CHAP.
XXXVIII.
ÆT. 49-55.

At this delicate moment he has them both in his power and uses it. The political valet becomes a harsh master. Appalled at what he demands, they quail but must submit. Parnell, in a hideous situation, is miserably heroic for Ireland's sake as well as the woman's. He must steel himself to go through shame. If O'Shea is to be forced into Parliament, there is only one way to do it. A double return opens a by-election for Galway City. Hard driven, the Captain has still pluck enough and sharpens his tone as master. Even now he will not take the pledge to sit and vote with the Irish party. To support him on these terms will mean, as the fated dictator already knows, the risk of a blasting campaign. For over a month he recoils, while his enemy presses. Then he casts the die, and thrusts the man upon Galway. Biggar and Healy revolted. Biggar telegraphed prophetically to Parnell, “The O'Sheas will be your ruin”, and did not shrink from letting the city know that Parnell's candidate was the husband of Parnell's mistress.

O'Shea, on the contrary, claiming to be the indispensable

¹ Mrs. O'Shea, *Parnell*, vol. ii. p. 94.

² Liverpool, Exchange Division, November 25, 1885—

BAILY (Conservative)	.	.	.	.	.	2964
O'SHEA (Home Rule)	.	.	.	.	.	2909
STEPHENS (Liberal, retired)	.	.	.	.	.	36

agent of Ireland's true interests, had asked and obtained Chamberlain's testimonial:

TO O'SHEA

January 22, 1886.—In the present condition of Irish affairs, it is more than ever unfortunate that you have not found a seat. Is there any chance of your standing for one of those now vacant by double-elections in Ireland? Surely it must be to the interest of the Irish party to keep open channels of communication with the Liberal leaders. Can you not get Mr. Parnell's exequatur for one of the vacant seats? It is really the least he can do for you after all you have done for him.

All this was the beginning of Parnell's end. Chamberlain's former part of chief negotiator with the Irish party was transferred by Gladstone to John Morley. The new member for Galway found himself a nullity. Parnell after that staggering and ignoble exertion of power knew that nothing of the kind could be repeated and that at all costs he must risk O'Shea's worst; and shun Chamberlain, whom he must have supposed, quite wrongly, to have been fully in the Captain's private confidence. The latter so far had never mentioned domestic suspicions to Chamberlain; nor was it ever Chamberlain's habit to take gossip for proof. All efforts for a compromise on the first Home Rule Bill failed in May 1886, and with that O'Shea's dream of ruling Dublin Castle under a Radical Prime Minister.

Then the *Pall Mall Gazette*, on May 24, 1886, published the glaring paragraph—"Mr. Parnell's Suburban Retreat"—about the disastrous *liaison*. Driving to Eltham after midnight, Parnell was discovered by coming into collision with a market-gardener's cart. O'Shea never feigned civility towards him again. Next the member for Galway City defiantly abstained from the division on the Home Rule Bill. The day after, he resigned his seat; for he could no longer show his face as a candidate in any Nationalist constituency. As a sanguine agent his lights were extinguished. As a sinister principal his part was beginning.

III

O'Shea, though no longer in Parliament, continues in ample correspondence with Highbury. In 1887 especially he writes

masses of letters and memoranda. They are full of life and matter for all his cynicism about his countrymen.

CHAP.
XXXVIII.
Æt. 49-55.

When in Ireland he courts assiduously the bishops and clergy. In supplying information about every branch of a constructive Unionist policy for Ireland he is thoroughly useful. Upon the land and education, upon poverty and public works, upon arrears of rent, the congested districts, Catholic education, he abounds in shrewd suggestion, conveyed in his impeccable round script. This dossier shows that he has no contemptible intelligence or purpose. He analyses the local weaknesses of "the Parnellite faction" but ignores Parnell, whose ill-health and secrecy and weary contempt for all fervent rhetoric—whether Gladstonian or Hibernian—keep him at this time out of the scene.

In his own private affairs, O'Shea did not see his way. He had religious, patriotic and substantial scruples. His wife's very rich aunt, Mrs. Benjamin Wood, was nearly a hundred years old. Public scandal might induce her to alter her will to his children's prejudice and less directly to his own.

Affairs were in this standing when *The Times*, associated with the attributes of Jupiter, did indeed shake the world by a thunderclap. That authoritative newspaper, in extension of its articles on "Parnellism and Crime", published on April 18, 1887, in the alleged facsimile of the Irish leader's handwriting, a letter condoning the Phoenix Park murders. The murders had occurred less than five years before. They were like yesterday in national memory. After forty years and more that manuscript reproduced in *The Times* is indelibly photographed on eyes like the present writer's who saw it standing out in stupendous contrast to the ordinary appearance of a great journal, accustomed then to give only single headlines in small type to the most momentous or startling news. In our days, when sensations have become habitual like illuminated night-signs, no modern newspaper could hope to emulate the effect of the large, crude handwriting exhibited in *The Times*. This one exception to the reliable habit of a century was overwhelming. While Europe and the world re-echoed, the nation was diversely convulsed.

Chamberlain's attitude was typical of the feeling amongst leading Unionists. The facsimile, meant to be damning, looked hard

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

to credit; but on the other hand he thought it almost impossible that *The Times* of all newspapers could have acted without being sure of its proofs. Chamberlain himself knew little of Parnell's handwriting.

O'Shea, familiar with it, exulted. Always prone to believe what he wished to believe, he had no doubt that the incriminating signature was genuine and that Parnell was doomed. This seemed a satisfactory intervention of Providence. O'Shea would be fully revenged yet not implicated. Living in this dream for nearly two years, he made no menacing move of his own, expecting that vengeance and opulence together would soon arrive in a wonderful manner.

Parnell at once declared that *The Times* had been "hoodwinked, hoaxed, bamboozled". But refusing for more than twelve months to face an action against the great newspaper, he was prejudiced in English eyes and for that cared nothing. He was, in fact, right—a great player of the long game in all public affairs. Until he had some clue to the forger and felt sure of exposing the forgeries, he would not subject himself to cross-examination upon his whole career as a revolutionary agitator—a career bent towards the overthrow, not observance, of alien laws; full of incidents usual in national revolutions but indefensible and heinous according to the normal standards of British judges and juries. As time wore on Parnell's indifference began to look stronger than the charges. "Parnellism and Crime" could not stay the Liberal triumphs at the by-elections.

IV

In this way passed fifteen months of perplexity from the spring of 1887 to the summer of 1888. Then the long deadlock was suddenly broken by the irruption of Frank Hugh O'Donnell. This brilliant but irritable eccentric was a distinctive figure in a political generation crowded with personality. Of an old Celtic family, claiming kin with the aristocratic O'Donnells of Spain and Austria, familiar with continental affairs, he had been once a writer on the *Morning Post*. His eyeglass and talents made him prominent in the House of Commons. Full of sympathy with Young England as well as with Young Ireland, he often

acted with the Fourth party. He had long since quarrelled with Parnell. Dreaming of King, Lords and Commons in Ireland, he regarded Gladstone's spacious Bill as an affront to the dignity of a co-equal nation. In this spirit Mr. O'Donnell encouraged Chamberlain in "killing the Bill" but wished him afterwards to reunite Liberalism.

This was the unexpected person who brought an action for £50,000 against *The Times* because of some insignificant references to himself in its indictments of Irish agitation. O'Donnell was only an irascible Quixote, insulted by the windmill. He did not press his personal affair seriously, but it brought the greater business to a crisis. During the preparation of his case, an inspection of documents at Printing House Square gave Parnell and his friends some of the clues they wanted. Now, at last, events were accelerated and moved to velocity. When "O'Donnell v. Walter" came into court on July 3, 1888, the Attorney-General himself, Sir Richard Webster, appeared for the newspaper. Sweeping aside the mere plaintiff, he not only repeated but multiplied the charges against the Irish leader. New and more terrible forgeries were produced in Court—remember, by the Attorney-General of the Government of the day—including the grotesque incitement in which the misspelling of one word gave a clue to the forger:

DEAR E.—What are these fellows waiting for? . . . Let there be an end of this hesitancy.

To be capable of writing that letter Parnell would have had to be an idiot as well as a villain. He could act at last.

Immediately he raised the question in the House of Commons and demanded a Select Committee to enquire into the forgeries. Everyone now agrees that his request ought to have been granted, and that the specific issue whether the facsimile letters were forged or not ought to have been separated from the general charges. The personal honour of a great figure in the House was at stake. The Government refused. They desired, in Unionist interests, "to try a revolution as well as a man". They offered a Special Commission of three Judges to investigate the whole promiscuous mass of charges contained in the articles on "Parnellism and Crime".

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

Here Chamberlain intervened. His letters to America show how antagonisms clashed in the House after the case of "O'Donnell v. Walter", and after the new allegation of infamies against Parnell:

TO MISS ENDICOTT

July 7, 1888.—People in England are greatly interested in *The Times* against Parnell & Co. There is no doubt that they have additional evidence and that they entirely believe it is true. Such a journal as *The Times* has a great reputation to keep up and would never bring accusations lightly . . . he [Parnell] contents himself with a blank denial which carries no conviction . . . it is almost certain that Parnell would go to a Court of Law if he were not afraid of the cross-examination. Possibly he may be innocent of the main charge and yet so mixed up with the conspiracy that he dare not defend himself.

July 10.—Here is a state secret for you. As soon as I got to town I saw Hartington and James about Parnell's Commission for enquiry into the charges against him. I believe that this is a bravado dictated by the certainty that the Government will refuse to grant a Committee. I pressed upon Hartington that such a refusal would be a grievous mistake, and that we ought to take Parnell at his word and grant an enquiry. As usual, I could not make any impression, but then I went to the Government and saw W. H. Smith and the Attorney-General. They were much more ready to listen, and I hope and believe that they will (to the great confusion of Mr. Parnell and his friends) declare their intention to appoint a Royal Commission to enquire into all the charges against the leaders of the Irish party. I am convinced that this Commission will elicit some astounding facts and if the result is to show that more than one member of the so-called Nationalist party has been dabbling in assassination the effect would be prodigious. . . .

July 13.—It appears that the Parnellites feel they must accept a Commission of Enquiry, though they will haggle over the terms. I see that the Press Association says that the affair was the suggestion of Mr. Chamberlain. "Artful Mr. Chamberlain!"

July 17.—The Parnellites seem very much bothered at the prospect of a Commission of Enquiry. It almost looks too as if Parnell were unnerved, and I begin to think that he is really afraid of the result.

July 17.— . . . It is said that *The Times* is getting fresh information every day and that the conspirators are beginning to peach on one

another. . . . Anyway, it is now necessary that the matter should be cleared up once for all, and I have just been talking to Lord Salisbury, and find that the Government is inclined to take my view and press for the Commission in any case, and whether Mr. Parnell accepts it willingly or not. . . .

CHAP.
XXXVIII.
Æt. 49-55.

But he did not mean sharp practice, and soon thought the Government were going too far. He urged in conversation and correspondence that the enquiry ought to be restricted; that the tribunal should be constituted in a fair manner; and that Parnell's own wishes ought to be met as far as possible.

July 23.—MY DEAR HARTINGTON—I am very anxious to turn the flank of the Opposition and to enlist public opinion definitely in favour of the impartiality and fairness of the proposed Commission. I think there is undoubtedly something to be said for the contention that the terms of reference are too wide and may lead to undue prolongation of the enquiry and to the introduction of irrelevant matter. . . .

Happily for vivid history, though not for prompt justice, his view did not prevail. In the following days the unlimited Special Commission was instituted by the House of Commons and by a Unionist majority little dreaming what would happen. The Radical Unionist made a speech of consummate skill. Before we come to his argument we may give his own record of the effect in the House.

TO MISS ENDICOTT

July 24, 1888.—12 P.M.—The situation was critical. . . . I rose and spoke for about fifty minutes. According to many members on all sides, I made one of the best speeches I have ever made in the House, and, as I was satisfied myself, I think it must have been good, for I am a severe critic of my own performances. The House became crowded as soon as I was up and gave me a most flattering attention. The Irishmen made one or two feeble attempts to interrupt, but soon abandoned them and afterwards listened intently. I think it has settled the Bill. It will be carried without serious amendment, and then we shall know the truth about Parnellism and Crime and whether or not the charges of *The Times* have any justification. I was very much complimented and thanked. . . . Collings has just come in to say that the Government and everybody he spoke to were loud in praises of my speech. . . .

BOOK IX. *July 25.*—I heard a great number of pleasant things about my speech yesterday which appears to have produced a great effect; one man said that in all his experience he had never seen the House listen with such rapt attention.

In this most skilful performance he warned all concerned that the graver letters were everything. "To lead the enquiry off into subsidiary and comparatively unimportant matters would be, in my opinion, fatal to the reputation of *The Times* and fatal to its success."¹ But he had taken his effective part in defeating the Irish leader's demand for a Parliamentary Committee to deal specifically with the forgeries; and in substituting a legal tribunal to judge an insurrectionary movement. As never before the Nationalist chief was roused against the Radical Unionist.

V

A week later, Parnell, with intense bitterness, attacked Chamberlain direct, accusing him of having been ready when a Minister to use Irish members for his own underhand ends and betray to them the secrets of the Cabinet. It was near midnight. As the debate was adjourned the Irish party cheered themselves hoarse and T. P. O'Connor raised the cry of "Judas Chamberlain!" At that statesman's protest to the Speaker, the ferocious cry was withdrawn.

Next day Parnell resumed his interrupted speech, and, with cold deliberation, syllable by syllable, continued his accusations, promising to prove them before the Commission by documentary evidence.

Mr. Chamberlain next addressed the House in a manner the studious calm of which excelled even Mr. Parnell's. He was evidently deeply wounded, but had completely recovered the habitual self-possession momentarily lost at midnight when the tumultuous cry of "Judas" went up from the Irish camp.²

He was able to assert, what the readers of this book have seen to be true, that all his proceedings in connection with the Kilmainham treaty and the National Council plan had been fully

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. *bury Parliament*, pp. 97-100 (July 30 cccxxix. (July 24, 1888).

² Henry W. Lucy, *Diary of the Salis-*

reported by him to the Cabinet.¹ Gladstone rose to confirm his former colleague's assertion as to the National Council episode—CHAP.
XXXVIII
ÆT. 49-51 but as to Kilmainham he made the somewhat grudging reservation that he could not assert the completeness of his memory.² We know from the evidence in these pages that fuller recollection would have bound him to give more generous testimony.

The affair, instead of ending there, involved Chamberlain in one of the most disconcerting experiences of his career. O'Shea blundered into print.³ Parnell, replying in *The Times*, challenged Chamberlain to publish any proof that the Irish leader had ever regarded a Central Council as "in the slightest degree a substitute for a Parliament".⁴ To that journal Chamberlain wrote accepting the challenge: he would meet it in a few days after looking into his papers. Expecting, with the utmost confidence, to unhorse the Irish leader, he prepared an elaborate draft and called in O'Shea to compare notes. That gentleman remembered too well a letter of his own caricaturing with ingenious levity Chamberlain's ideas and words.⁵ The Radical Minister at the time sent a scathing repudiation to O'Shea but since then had forgotten the incident. The travesty was in Parnell's hands. If he recited or printed it, the effect would be Chamberlain's discomfiture one way or the other. He could only defend himself by asserting the untrustworthiness of O'Shea. But in that case he would discredit his only witness against the Irish leader. Either way Parnell would come off with all the advantages. Infuriated with the ex-emissary, and seeing him for the first time in a cruel light, the Radical Unionist found himself in an odious dilemma.

There was no help for it. The intended answer to Parnell had to be withheld from publication. Instead, to the surprise of public opinion, Chamberlain sent a very mild letter to *The Times* summarising clearly the origin of the National Council scheme, and adding that "neither at this time nor subsequently has it appeared to me that there was anything in these communications of which Mr. Parnell had cause to be ashamed".⁶

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 4, 1888.
cccxxix. (July 31, 1888).

² *Ibid.*

³ Letter to *The Times* dated August 1, 1888.

⁴ Letter to *The Times* dated August

⁵ January 18, 1885. See Vol. I. of this book (pp. 582-584).

⁶ Letter to *The Times* dated August 11, 1888.

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

Chamberlain learned at last that the former interpreter, self-deluded, had not been a safe auxiliary. True, as we know, that he already regarded the Captain as both cynical and plausible; but then the man was so amusing, ingratiating, intelligent; so helpful at times in supplying practical information about Irish details. Thinking that O'Shea with all his faults had been badly used both as a husband and a politician, his patron so far had regarded him with much indulgence. That easy feeling is rudely jarred at the present pinch. Psychologically his own account of this vexation is illuminating.

• TO MISS ENDICOTT

July 30, 1888.—At 4 P.M. I had to go down to the House and stayed until the close of the sitting which has been occupied with the Parnell Bill. The feeling is very intense. . . . Just at the close of the evening Trevelyan made a slight attack on me which induced me to get up and pepper him. Then Parnell attacked me in most venomous terms and was speaking when the hour for adjournment came. As the Chairman of Committee left the chair one of the Irish members, a cockney Irishman, T. P. O'Connor, roared out "Judas Chamberlain". The offence was so gross that I was obliged to call the Speaker's attention to it. . . . The scene was pretty hot, I can tell you, and shows how excited these Celtic gentlemen are getting now that there is a chance of their being found out.

July 31.—I have been in the thick of the fight but have come out with flying colours. . . . Parnell himself rose to continue the speech which was cut short at twelve o'clock yesterday. . . . He was very venomous, and repeated and enlarged his former attack on me. I had been doubtful whether to take any notice of his previous outburst, but Hartington thought I had better say something, so when he sat down I got up and in a crowded and most attentive House replied to him. I turned round and faced him twice: the first time when I told him that I did not shirk inquiry; and the second when I told him that I had letters of his proving that he was the author of the scheme for National Councils which he had denied all responsibility for, and they were in his handwriting and not that of his Secretary. . . . Certainly he did not score to-night. The gist of his charge was that I was endeavouring in 1885 to serve the Irish party at the expense of my colleagues. My answer was in a sentence that my colleagues were informed by me of everything I

was doing, and Mr. Gladstone, to whom I appealed, was obliged to confirm me, though I must say he appeared to do so very unwillingly. . . . The atmosphere is most hostile and the situation most interesting.

CHAP.
XXXVIII
Æt. 49-55.

August 1.—I have been working all the morning in connection with last night's incident. Mr. O'Shea, who was the channel of communication between Parnell and myself, will confirm my statement, and there are other disclosures to make to-night affecting Mr. Parnell, which will go far I think to destroy his influence. He shall have the whole story now, and he will not like it. The strain of this personal controversy is tremendous. . . . To-morrow there will be a letter from O'Shea in *The Times* which ought to complete Parnell's discomfiture. . . .

August 6.—To-day appears in *The Times* a letter from Parnell. . . . The letter is very jesuitical and does not actually deny anything we have said, though it implies that our statements are false. I telegraphed at once to *The Times* to say that I accepted the challenge and, after examining my papers, would send a full reply in the course of a few days. Consequently I shall be working as hard as I know how, looking over old documents and papers. I have just finished a draft reply which I must submit to O'Shea to see if his memory tallies with mine, and which I think will be a pretty hard nut to crack. . . .

August 8.—1 A.M.—O'Shea came this afternoon to talk it all over. In the course of conversation he referred to something I had entirely forgotten, namely, that in 1885 he had written a letter to Parnell purporting to give the result of an interview with me. He showed me this letter at the time, and I protested against it as inaccurate and was very angry about it, but it suddenly struck me that Parnell has this letter. From indications in some of the papers it is quite probable that he means to publish it, although, of course, it was confidential in the highest degree. It is an odious letter, cynical, personal, mean . . . but unfortunately O'Shea put his thoughts and interpretations into my words and in writing to Parnell credited me with his own political morality. What will happen if this letter is produced? In my own defence I must throw over O'Shea, and say what is the truth, that he grossly misrepresented me; but then if he misrepresented *me*, may he not also have misrepresented Parnell? And he is my chief witness against Parnell. Altogether it is a nice dilemma. Either he is a trustworthy witness, in which case my negotiations with him were of the most selfish and ignoble kind; or

BOOK
IX.

1885-91.

else he is untrustworthy, in which case I have no evidence to convict Parnell.

It is a most unfortunate business, and it will take all my wits and all the courage I can muster to fight my way out of it. Really it is enough to make a man despair. I entered into this negotiation with the best intention and with the hope of serving both Ireland and England. By the indiscretion and unworthiness of the agent selected, I am quite likely to be represented as animated by ambitions of the meanest and most selfish kind, and it will not be very easy to prove my innocence in a tangle like this. How am I to write to you with an easy mind? To-morrow I must write a new letter in the place of the one I had intended to send. It is likely that I may have to discredit O'Shea; it is no use resting on his testimony now. I have other witnesses; but I dare not call them except in the last resort, as they are Home Rulers and politically hostile. I remember telling you before we were engaged that there was much that was dramatic in public life. It is true, and many times a storm comes up out of a blue sky. . . . I had O'Shea with me for three hours this afternoon, and then sent him away to think over the matter.

August 9.— . . . I have seen O'Shea again and have arranged the lines on which we will now proceed. I think it will come out all right, but it is provoking to find that one has been compromised by somebody else in a matter which was really undertaken with the most disinterested motives. . . .

August 10.— . . . I am still kept very busy with correspondence and other business largely arising out of the Parnell incident. This morning John Morley came to talk over our correspondence and action in 1882. He has been looking over his diary and my letters, and tells me that there is quite sufficient evidence in them both of my consistency and of my loyalty to my colleagues. I was interrupted here for the second time this morning. . . . Well, this time it was the everlasting O'Shea who stopped to lunch. I think I have done with him for a few days, having settled everything as far as it can be done in the present state of our knowledge.

He had got to the truth. O'Shea, meaning to exercise ineffable finesse in his negotiations, had always in effect misrepresented the inner mind of each man to the other. Chamberlain remained on terms of distant civility with the ex-envoy, but never again gave an opening to his diplomatic talents.

VI

None the less, now that the Captain has reappeared prominently in these pages, we must follow his part to the end of the tragedy. His enmity to Parnell is notorious, though all his private motives are not yet avowed.

CHAP.
XXXVIII.
Æt. 49-55

There is a picturesque interlude before his rôle becomes fatal. Visiting Portugal and Spain on business, as he often does, he writes from Oporto an attractive letter on matters far removed from politics.

September 25, 1888.— . . . My friends and I have had a pleasant journey through Galicia and Northern Portugal—up the valley of the Miño and down that of the Douro—two of the richest and loveliest valleys. . . . You who believe in the influence of port wine on British statesmanship, however, will be sorry to hear that the devastation of the phylloxera surpasses all my expectations. Some, or rather many, of the sun-trap glens, which grew the finest port when I passed through them a few years ago, are now barren—and one rides for miles and miles by bare terraces and neglected quintas.

From southern scenes O'Shea returns to take part, as he supposes, in the approaching ruin of his enemy. When he is summoned to give evidence before the Commission there is an ugly squabble with Highbury. He wishes "to exchange views as to old events before going into the box". Chamberlain shuns this sort of identification with one whom he now regards as "an indiscreet and therefore a dangerous person".¹ O'Shea next asks to have the immediate use of "all letters, memoranda and telegrams of mine between 1882 and 1886". When this could not be done for him in a hurry, or without discrimination, he telegraphs angrily:

October 25.—I will fight my own battle and entertain my own opinion of Liberal Unionist chivalry.

By an answer telling him that he had taken umbrage at nothing he is as quickly appeased. On the last day of October he gives his evidence before the judges, and uses Chamberlain's name with a freedom implying much more intimacy than ever

¹ Chamberlain to Miss Endicott, October 22.

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

had been between them. He suggests the high importance of his political activities through the half-decade before the Galway election and the defeat of the first Home Rule Bill. With intimate knowledge of Parnell's handwriting, he declares and repeats his entire conviction that the signatures to the forged letters are genuine. He is an adroit witness, and is delighted with himself when on the whole he foils Sir Charles Russell's cross-examination. In his typical way he exaggerates this success when writing next day to Highbury:

November 1.—I went into the witness-box yesterday under a very heavy load of anxiety. . . . Once it came to fighting Russell, however, all went well and I had him down round after round.

At the end of the year he writes from Madrid:

December 28, 1888.—If as I suppose Pigott is a principal witness he is likely to be easily attacked, for there is little doubt he has done many things for money in his career as a patriot, and besides his constitution is much weakened by drink. . . . There cannot in my opinion be the slightest doubt as to the signatures of the incriminating letters.

VII

Thus at the opening of 1889, when Chamberlain resumed political activity after his marriage, he expected on the whole, no less than O'Shea and most Unionists, that Parnell would soon be proved guilty. But on St. Valentine's Day—a week before the parliamentary session opened—the rumblings of Unionist disaster began, and were followed by crash on crash.¹

More thrilling days never were known in any modern political trial than those of the second half of February 1889. First the fatuity with which the forgeries had been accepted and paid for was disclosed. Then the lamentable Pigott with his bald head, red face, white whiskers, loose mouth, his disreputable but not unkindly lineaments, foolishly smiling—he looked like a churchwarden or sidesman gone wrong—was racked and crushed in the witness-box. Asked to write down the word hesitancy, he spelt it "hesitency". Blackmailer, parasite, most mercenary of

¹ John Macdonald, *The Daily News Diary of the Parnell Commission* (February 14-February 22, pp. 139-161).

grubs in Grub Street, vendor of obscene books and photographs, he was hopelessly exposed in the witness-box; and out of Court the wretched creature volunteered to Labouchere a full confession of his forgeries. CHAP.
XXXVIII.
ÆT. 49-55.

Now comes into these pages one of the oddest things of all. Pigott fled from Anderton's Hotel in Fleet Street to Madrid. Why Madrid? Did he know—as some of those he had imposed on knew—that O'Shea was there? We cannot tell. But the Captain, singular to say, had a glimpse of the despairing nin-compoop just before the suicide, and in one of his best letters, in unagitated copperplate, that glimpse is described:

O'SHEA TO CHAMBERLAIN

March 9, 1889.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN—. . . I suppose it is all up with *The Times'* case. I remember that you disagreed with the opinion that I expressed seven months ago that a breakdown in this accusation would lead to the triumph of Gladstone's scheme, whatever it might chance to be. Unless his followers overdo the shouting the effect of the occurrence must in any case reach far. When you have a few minutes to spare I hope you will write me your impressions on the subject.

About 7 P.M. on Thursday week, I saw a man accompanied by another with the superscription "Interprete Fonda de Embajadores", enter the Café Inglés in the Calle de Sevilla. Having seen portraits of Pigott and read descriptions of his appearance, in newspapers, I observed the former, who called for a bottle of beer and an English newspaper. I suppose the interpreter took him to the café in question, because it is the only one (I think) where an English paper is taken in.

I was soon convinced that the stranger was Pigott. He "quartered" the paper as I have often seen journalists do; his hand trembled; then he looked round the café through an eye-glass, rose suddenly, touched the interpreter on the shoulder, and left hurriedly.

I mentioned the matter to the President of the Chamber and other friends whom I met in the course of the evening, and hearing of the suicide a few minutes after it occurred the next day, I had no doubt of the identity. I am sorry the Attorney-General had not the opportunity of re-examining Pigott—although judging by the wretched manner he has conducted the case I am not sure he would have made much out of him. Still, Labouchere's conduct has been very suspicious, and something might have "transpired" as the reporters say.

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

Chamberlain had no illusions. He knew that with Pigott's fiasco the case against Parnellism was blown to the winds in popular opinion. Immeasurable was Gladstonian and Nationalist exultation. What sequel was thinkable now but overwhelming victory? Then Parnell in cross-examination is damaged by himself, when he wearily admits an act of duplicity which he has not committed.¹ Suggesting that the morals of politics are those of war—which to his mind was true—he creates an uneasy impression of bad faith on ordinary people. He looks ghastly ill. Prescient of a new and worse danger, he must have counted all else unreal. Thus hating and distrusting it all he passed through dazzling triumphs. In one scene when he enters the House, Mr. Gladstone bows low to him, while all Home Rulers rise with acclaim. In another scene at the Eighty Club, Lord Spencer shakes hands with him. Next, Edinburgh offers him its freedom by a vote of nearly two to one in its City Council. Notably, as Mr. Birrell remembers, he dines at the Sydney Buxtons', when Mr. Gladstone expatiates on the enormous iniquities accompanying the Act of Union. "And you remember, Mr. Parnell. . . ." Mr. Parnell does not remember; he has no historical bent and prefers chemical experiments. When he leaves with Mr. Birrell his comment on the erudite patriarch is: "The old gentleman is very talkative".²

So in 1889, after Pigott's suicide, it went from March to December. Then near the year's end Parnell was a guest at Hawarden, and may have crossed its threshold with a shiver, so psychic were his superstitions.³ By this visit the solid respectability of the Irish leader is made eminent in the eyes of the majority of the nation. They think him on a safe pinnacle. Are not the by-elections pointing to the triumph of Home Rule? Parnell knows better. His relative indifference to the exposure of the forgeries and to his own apotheosis is explained by his deeper apprehensions on a different matter. There will be another *cause célèbre* and a worse. An outraged valet of politics

¹ Barry O'Brien, *Parnell*, vol. ii. p. 226. He said that he must have made a certain statement "to mislead the House of Commons." The judges found on investigation that "Mr. Parnell was accurate when he made that statement," and had not misled the

House.

² Mr. Augustine Birrell's reminiscence in conversation with the present writer.

³ For Gladstone's own account of his guest, see Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 420.

may well destroy the Protestant leader of a Catholic people.

CHAP.
XXXVIII.
Æt. 49-55.

VIII

For O'Shea, these long months after Pigott's destruction were gall and wormwood. Two private reasons were as unbearable as the public spectacle of Parnell's progress. The money-motive doubled the conjugal grievance. To the last O'Shea had believed in the genuineness of the forged letters, and expected Parnell's destruction. The uncrowned king sent to penal servitude, O'Shea would be master of the domestic situation, with its great financial contingencies. Vengeance with opulence had been a hope now extinct. Parnell's apotheosis in Great Britain, from early spring to Christmas in 1889, would have been bitter enough to O'Shea had there been no other motive than his feelings as a spouse and a politician.

But there was a further and deciding motive. Shortly after Pigott's suicide, Mrs. Benjamin Wood, aunt of O'Shea's wife and assumed to be worth £200,000 or more, expired at the extreme age of 98; and left all her fortune to her cherished niece, Mrs. O'Shea. In effect, Parnell triumphed again. Were this situation accepted, O'Shea must become the most abject of dependants upon his wife and her paramour. It must be admitted that fiction cannot exceed the position. The mildest flesh and blood could scarce bear it. Powerful relations of Mrs. Benjamin Wood deceased were determined to contest the will. With them O'Shea made common cause.

The will cannot be separated from the divorce case. The latter seems an engine to upset the former. Here we must go back a little. O'Shea before the Special Commission had no sooner declared in evidence his belief that the spurious facsimiles were genuine than he began to expand his confidences in a singular manner. When, at the beginning of December 1888, Chamberlain reached Havre with his wife, he found, waiting there, a portentous intimation written a month before.

O'SHEA TO CHAMBERLAIN

November 3, 1888.—As I am going away, I had better tell you that the anxiety I felt was occasioned by the fact that Mrs. O'Shea is under

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

a written engagement not to communicate directly or indirectly with Mr. Parnell, and the latter under a written order not to do so with Mrs. O'Shea.

I daresay a great many people have some notion of the state of affairs, but I am most anxious for my children's sake that nothing about it should be actually published, because a very large fortune for them may depend upon its not coming into print.

I believe Mrs. Wood of Eltham is worth £200,000 or more, all left to them, and . . . Mrs. O'Shea's relations would use any weapon to change her Will.

Years ago I begged that affairs should be so arranged that *in no case* could I myself inherit any of this money. It is on their account that I can safely say to you that the anxiety was in no way personal.

Chamberlain guardedly replies:

Paris, December 5, 1888.—I sympathise with you in your domestic anxiety, which must have added very much to the wear and tear of the last few months. I have felt that I could not say a word to you on the subject until you spoke to me.

There is a long silence on the delicate domestic theme, while Parnell receives homage in Great Britain.

At the same time the question of money and great expectations came also to a crisis; and in a manner seeming to turn the spite of all things against one thwarted, outraged man. When "Aunt Ben" died at last, leaving her niece Mrs. O'Shea sole heiress and executrix, that lady, who had played for high stakes, must have felt for the moment that she had won them. O'Shea was roused to strike at last. There was nothing to gain by waiting, perhaps much to lose. The *dénouement* is now very near. To Chamberlain, whom he has not seen for a long time, he writes a full letter—not marked private. It throws a flood of light:

O'SHEA TO CHAMBERLAIN

October 13, 1889.—I daresay you will forgive me troubling you like a very few others, with an explanation of some personal matters.

You are aware that I have had much domestic trial, complicated by considerations concerning the interests of my children, and my desire to avoid the injury certain to be inflicted on them by full publicity of

a scandal gross in itself, but all the more re-echoing on account of the persons concerned. CHAP.
XXXVIII.
Æt. 49-55.

One or two details contained in the enclosure will enable you to judge of the perfidy of which I have been the victim.¹

I now pass to another subject. Some months ago Mrs. Wood of The Lodge, Eltham, died aged 98, leaving all her estate, real and personal, to her niece, Mrs. O'Shea. The former consists of land in Gloucestershire, the latter of £145,000 in Consols.

While naturally anxious for my children's advantage, I have always endeavoured to have as little as possible to do personally with Mrs. Wood's affairs,² but Messrs. Freshfield & Williams found that under my marriage settlement, and as my children's guardian, I must intervene in the suit of "O'Shea v. Wood and another", consequent on my brothers-in-law . . . disputing the Will on their own behalf and that of their sisters. . . . For them the Attorney-General and Sir Henry James have been retained, for Mrs. O'Shea, Sir Charles Russell and Mr. Inderwick, and I have told Freshfield and Williams to retain Mr. Finlay for me.

So there is every element of a *cause célèbre* and of very heavy costs.

But as it concerns my character, and is a gratifying instance of appreciation of my conduct, I am chiefly desirous that my friends should know that notwithstanding the antagonism of our interests in the lawsuit, I am not only on terms of intimacy with Mrs. O'Shea's family, but that I possess their affection, esteem and sympathy in a very marked degree. . . .

Now to revert to the other business. Owing to some recent circumstances, it is under consideration whether some strong action should not be taken by me, and I am anxious that you (and a few others) should be rightly informed. . . .

To this very odd and startling communication, more por-

¹ In the enclosure referred to in this letter O'Shea says: "It was on the 13 June 1887 that I ascertained that the paragraph in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of May 24, '86, was true and that Parnell was staying in Mrs. O'Shea's house at the time of the accident." He goes on to quote the letter dated June 27, 1887, in which his wife undertakes that "there shall be no further communication direct or indirect" with Parnell.

² Several years later, however

(March 30, 1892), O'Shea gives a more realistic account to Chamberlain: "I calculate my income from 1880 to the year of Mrs. Wood's death as averaging over £2500 irrespective of any present from Mrs. Wood, who allowed my former wife about £4000 a year; but often, and especially in 1882, I was in want of money, owing to political expenses and, if you will, extravagant personal outlay, and I certainly pressed my former wife to keep her aunt up to her promises".

tentous perhaps than any charge in *The Times*, the reply from Highbury was framed with care:

CHAMBERLAIN TO O'SHEA

October 14.—MY DEAR O'SHEA,—I am sincerely sorry that you should have such cause of anxiety and trouble. I have never listened to scandalous reports affecting my friends and in your case I have heard nothing, and knew nothing, beyond what you have told me. That is bad enough and I can see how much worry may lie behind it. I fear that these things cannot be hushed up in the days of *Pall Mall Gazette*s and *Stars*; and I am not sure that the boldest course is not always the wisest.

However, I have no right to express an opinion, and it would not be worth anything unless founded on more information than I possess. I am glad that you have the sympathy and support of members of your wife's family. In the event of any publicity, that is a strong point in your favour.

Captain O'Shea approached Cardinal Manning "as my bishop, in order to get a dispensation from my Church to commence an action", but for religious and political reasons alike, the Cardinal could not be brought to assist. O'Shea, so far, had been a most respectful son of the Church, but perhaps too much for him was Parnell's reception at Hawarden. After it there was a "dreadful scene" at Brighton. Parnell had left Hawarden on December 19. On Christmas Eve, O'Shea telegraphed to Highbury that he had launched his bolt. An explanatory letter followed the telegram:

O'SHEA TO CHAMBERLAIN

December 30, 1889.—MY DEAR CHAMBERLAIN,—There is no need to go into details, because you get all the papers and (I suppose) plenty of private comments. On Christmas evening, I telegraphed to you the fact that I had filed a petition in the matter of our last correspondence.

Last week I went to Brighton with my son who is staying with me for his holidays. He called unexpectedly at one of his mother's houses there (she has two) and found a lot of Mr. Parnell's things, some of which he chucked out of the window. There was a dreadful scene, and on our return to London we went to the lawyers and settled that an action should be immediately instituted. There was an atrocious article next day in the *New York Herald*, against which I must take an action

also, but my lawyers say we must wait until the writs (which the respondent and co-respondent are evading) shall be served.

CHAP.
XXXVIII.
Æt. 49-55.

I placed the matter in October before Cardinal Manning, as my bishop, in order to get a dispensation from my Church to commence an action. I am sorry to say that Messrs. Freshfield came to the conclusion that His Eminence was trying to gain time and screen Parnell.

There was a bitter correspondence on the subject in which I was obliged to mention a former matter, the conduct of His Eminence with regard to the proposed Local Government Scheme.¹ I must get it copied in order to send it to Rome, and I shall be anxious to know something about your plans so as either to send it to you or await your return. The excitement is very great.—Yours very truly, W. H. O'SHEA.

P.S.—I have just heard that the *Freeman* of to-day contains an interview with Mr. Parnell, in which he says that the action is part of the base conspiracy of *The Times*.

These messages had to go far before they reached "Joseph in Egypt"—as the jest of the day went—at the beginning of 1890 amidst scenes which made him a complete Imperialist. The telegram from O'Shea reached him on the Sudanese frontier; the explanation by letter found him viewing the Pyramids. He answered:

Bedrasheen, Egypt, January 10, 1890.—You know that I have never presumed to refer to your private affairs, in regard to which every man must judge for himself; but now that you have taken the decisive step, I may be allowed to say that it seems to me to have been forced upon you, and that any further hesitation would have given rise to an accusation of complacency under an injury which no honourable man can patiently endure.

IX

We can now establish one thing. From that day to this calumnious whispers have alleged without a shred of evidence that Chamberlain, to bring down Parnell, instigated O'Shea's divorce suit and financed it. It was said that O'Shea with a false beard had repaired by night to Prince's Gardens and there received some thousands in bank-notes. Ranker fudge could not be conceived. Chamberlain was not connected in any way, the

¹ 1885. The National Councils plan.

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

remotest, with the decision to take divorce proceedings. What brought them about was old Mrs. Benjamin Wood's will, coinciding with Parnell's triumphal honours after Pigott's exposure. Daring to extremity, and overdoing it, the woman in the case and Parnell must have hoped to keep the Captain as a financial dependant, a pensioner in their power. Otherwise they would be in his. They under-estimated him. Just when Parnell endured rather than enjoyed the world's laudation, O'Shea, the Figaro of politics, with all his light and dubious elements, was a sorely tried man.

The tragic pair had driven him to desperation. He would now make them his victims, as for long years he had been their puppet.

Up to the trial, his letters are full of his troubles. There are quarrels and quibbles about the bearing of a marriage settlement on the money affair. The culprits are endlessly obstructive. It is hard to bring them to book.

O'SHEA TO CHAMBERLAIN

March 19, 1890.— . . . I am told that Mr. Parnell expects to be able to postpone the trial until after the long vacation. It is grievous work. Over 200 declarations have been taken for me and the case against Parnell is overwhelming, not only in itself but in the treachery of the circumstances. . . .

August 3.— . . . I am being subjected to every kind of injury and persecution; slander, gross extortion, attempts to corrupt witnesses of mine, unremitting shadowings. My solicitors withal are constantly plied with suggestions for compromise, "No difficulty as to terms!" . . .

Against the long attempt to break his nerve he says he is sustained by the approval of many bishops and clergy, and he can even write with some grandeur:

September 7, 1890.—I have endeavoured to make myself as disagreeable as possible to the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and to Dr. Walsh. The primary object, however, is to arm some willing hands at Rome. . . .

But at this time Chamberlain with his wife had left to visit her parents in America. He received no more confidences.

Then came the historic crash. On November 15 the undefended Parnell - O'Shea divorce suit was heard, with its details of desolating squalor. The decree was pronounced on Monday, November 17. CHAP.
XXXVIII.
ÆT. 49-55.

The next terrific weeks belong to the general annals of the United Kingdom as then composed and to the annals of the world. Far-reaching was the effect on the life of the subject of this book.

For a brief moment, the marvellous legend of Parnell seemed likely in the eyes of his own race to outweigh his private offence and to carry him through a national crisis as through the local ordeal of the Galway election. Who could hope to fill Parnell's place? Who else could keep Nationalist Ireland compacted? Who had manipulated the British party system to master the Imperial Parliament? Who had put Gladstone into power in 1886 and made Home Rule possible? Reinstated with passionate allegiance at Leinster Hall in Dublin, Parnell was re-elected leader by his party at Westminster.

Gladstone, after oddly hoping that the Pope would act, launched his own excommunication. Precipitate method was again a fatal blunder, certain to rend Ireland and destroy Home Rule. How could he have dreamed that Parnell—"being who?" as Browning says—would accept deposition by him? Parnell never regarded Gladstone as anything but a prodigy of words, and considered himself the stronger of the two. How could he do anything but fight to the death? Should not Gladstone have made his grave representations direct and in private and shown more careful respect for Parnell's greatness in the past? In the long course of years, had not Gladstone become more public than human? His attitude at this crisis towards another man he could not dominate is singularly like his disregard of the Radical leader five years before.

Now the Gladstone letter unconsciously doomed, half a decade later, what the Hawarden kite began. The great adventure of 1886 had come to a hopeless sequel. It would have been better far for both islands had Gladstone himself at eighty-one retired at last.

They had all forgotten what the real Parnell was like. For some years Parnell seemed to have forgotten himself. Now the

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

heavy shadow which had obscured him was gone. Glaring exposure was in its way a liberation. Though he stood in a desperate light, he revealed all the pride and will, craft and ruthlessness, simplicity and fatalism belonging to his rare career. In the gloom of December the old Irish party went through its fetid agony, and broke asunder in Committee Room 15, where Chamberlain's meeting in 1886 had disrupted the old Liberal party. Ireland became a chaos of fury and disgrace. Fast burning out his life in the struggle against overwhelming odds, Parnell in his forty-sixth year, perhaps glad to be done with life's fever, soon lay in the earth of Glasnevin. He was buried as evening fell, and for all the hopes of those who fought for and against him in Nationalist Ireland there was to be a very long night.

X

A few words must be added about Captain O'Shea's epilogue. For Samson to pull down the pillars is intelligible. For Figaro to do it beats the Bible. He had high hopes of political honours. "He who smashes Parnell smashes Parnellism" (August 15, 1890). Believing himself to have been the saviour of the Union, he, poor man, expects recognition in the "proper quarters", a word habitual with Irishmen of his sort at that time. A few days after the decree *nisi*, when the Irish party is in its throes, he intimates that he wishes to reappear in Parliament as a Liberal Unionist. He has the folly to suppose that he will be popular—with the Unionists at least. After a conversation with the leader of Radical Unionism on November 27, he writes next day:

You are quite right, a borough would suit me much better than a county. . . . If you want me back in the House, this is the moment to strike and exact a promise.

On Chamberlain's part, there was no stroke and no promise. No constituency could be enthusiastic for the deluded man. No Unionist leader could recommend him. Against Healy's attacks he begs a testimonial from Chamberlain, who grants it in strictly political terms.¹

¹ Letters between Chamberlain and O'Shea, December 20 and December 24, 1890.

A long silence falls between them. At the end of March 1892, O'Shea reports that the Probate suit is compromised at last, "one half of the estate being put into the marriage-settlement and thus secured for my children".¹ But he complains bitterly about the unfairness of the compromise, and about almost everyone and everything:

CHAP.
XXXVIII.
ÆT. 49-55.

When a gipsy of Cordova has exhausted every other curse upon his enemy he finishes up with the most direful of all—"May you have law-suits and win them!" Under this curse I have spent the last three weary years without a friend to assist me.

Incidentally this last sentence completely refutes the suggestion that he was instigated and financed by Chamberlain. Personally the hapless O'Shea got very little out of it—unlucky and disappointed to the end.

After this he drops suddenly out of the narrative. There is no further trace of him in the private letters and papers. Chamberlain not being the least in his power, as the silliest of all the slanders assumed, had not encouraged his latter communications and did not desire further intercourse. Just as Liberal Unionists fled the thought of political association with him, we may guess that his connections in the City fared little better when the illusions about his confidential importance in politics were dispelled.

Years afterwards he made a last forlorn attempt to renew acquaintance, and again it is like a passage out of Thackeray. In 1898, Captain O'Shea writes in the old copperplate hand to the Colonial Office. Still dreaming of influence and opulence, he urges the great Imperial advantage of a new railway from Kosi Bay in Amatongaland to Pretoria and thence to Mafeking, superseding the Delagoa Bay route. He speaks of coal-mines, of a new and ample harbour "for Her Majesty's ships", of rich prospects for agricultural development, of large mineral traffic, of high policy and Madagascar. He and his friends—he pictures—have already made their arrangements with the Transvaal Government. Desiring that the Colonial Office shall grant for the British sections all the land required by public-spirited con-

¹ Old Mrs. Wood's money after her death had an unlucky history. Mrs. Parnell's share was largely lost by a speculating solicitor.

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

cession-seekers, he asks for a personal interview—"looking forward to seeing you after so many years". Instead of an interview there was a glacial refusal. Captain O'Shea lived seven years longer, but never wrote again. Lingered unnoticed, doubtless with a deep sense of the monstrous injustice of life, he died at Brighton, near so many dismal associations, in the spring of 1905. After October 1891, Parnell's grave was preferable to O'Shea's existence.

XI

If for Chamberlain it had been a long fight and a hard, the worst was over. As early as May 1886 he had written: "On the whole—and in spite of unfavourable symptoms—I think I shall win this fight, and shall have in the long run an increase of public influence".¹ His ability to frustrate both Gladstone and Parnell in the long run he never really doubted, though he sometimes pretended otherwise with a view to frightening Conservatives and Whigs into progress. Constructive power was all he cared for at heart. That it might never come to him again he thought very likely—he who would have become Prime Minister had his nature been more pliable. None the less his innermost intuition counted on time and tenacity. Almost fatalistic was his belief in his "line of luck". When he could not see an exit from dangers, he felt that he bore a charmed life in politics; that he could not fail; above all, that Gladstone had been wrong from beginning to end about English feeling and never would succeed.

TO MISS ENDICOTT

July 17, 1888.—A General Election may be a long way off and much may happen in the interval. Meanwhile the malignity and special violence with which I am assailed is a proof of my influence both in the House and in the country, and if Mr. Gladstone did come back he might have reason to dread my opposition and criticism. During my comparatively short political life, I have been over and over again threatened with extinction. It is easier threatened than performed. . . .

August 17.—*To the same.*—So the *Boston Herald* says that I have received a final blow. I have received so many that I have ceased to notice them. . . . You need not fear that I shall be extinguished by anything my opponents can do.

¹ Chamberlain to Dilke, May 6, 1886. Dilke's *Life*, vol. ii. p. 221.

TO DILKE

December 31.—I think the Gladstonian period is slowly coming to an end. It will leave great confusion behind, but its central idea is doomed. CHAP.
XXXVIII
Æt. 49-55

Chamberlain returned from the United States on November 19, 1890, two days after the decree of divorce in the case of Parnell-O'Shea. He learned in the newspapers that the Nonconformist revolt was in full blast against the Irish leader; that Parnell had "not the remotest intention" of retiring; that disruption of the Home Rule forces was certain. In the next days he saw the Irish phalanx shattered. He of all men could not be expected to pity it. They had requited him foully when he had honestly tried to be their friend. When he had differed, but was not yet irreconcilable, they had assailed him with a virulence never exceeded. He did not know that his well-meant association with O'Shea was one cause of their antipathy and of their leader's invincible mistrust. He never lifted a finger to ruin Parnell politically by exposing the secret of the Irish leader's personal life. He had nothing to do with it. Yet, as we have noted before, Chamberlain was the one person who, if matters had gone differently in 1885 and 1886, might have restrained O'Shea.

In this tumult the intermittent Diary, kept by Chamberlain for a few years, receives full entries on some days:

November 26, 1890.—Met Harcourt at lunch at Devonshire Club. He said he was watching events with a detached and impartial mind. He thought Parnell must go. He told me that Gladstone's letter given to McCarthy with express understanding that it should be communicated to the Irish meeting was kept back by McCarthy and Parnell and that the Irish are furious at having been deceived. He said he was glad that in his speeches he had never professed any belief in the "Union of Hearts". . . .

November 28.—J. Morley dined with me. He is very depressed at the position of affairs, especially in view of the publication of the manifesto promised by Mr. Parnell to-morrow. Parnell threatens fire and fury—he will use private correspondence, repeat private conversations, and do everything that a gentleman would not do. . . . Morley spoke of the result of the O'Shea trial as a fatal blow to the present Gladstonian

BOOK
IX.
1885-91.

party; he thought it would lead to a reconsideration of the whole situation. He was inclined to stay away from Parliament for a time.

December 1.—Sir H. James called to talk over the situation. Marjoribanks told him that whatever happened the Gladstonian party was pledged to Home Rule and must fight the next election on this policy. Saw Hartington in the House of Commons. He agreed that Home Rule in Mr. G.'s sense had lost its *raison d'être*, as it would be no longer possible to say that it is accepted freely by all the representatives of the Irish people.

December 2.—Sir Charles Dilke called. . . . He said he agreed that Home Rule in Mr. G.'s sense was dead, but it might appear in modified form in extensive Local Government for England, Scotland and Ireland.

December 3.—At Mrs. Jeune's dinner-party, Mr. Jeune said that Parnell and Mrs. O'Shea would marry as soon as the decree was made absolute and were afraid of anything which might lead to previous intervention of the Queen's Proctor. In the dispute with Mr. Gladstone they were holding back evidence and letters showing that he was in constant communication with Mrs. O'Shea.¹ At same party Goschen and W. H. Smith both assured me that recent events would have no effect on Government policy in Ireland and they would proceed with Local Government and other remedial measures as originally intended. I said I had heard that some of the Tories wanted now to draw back; but they both said they would not listen to anything of the kind.

December 5.—Childers said to me in the House of Commons that he hoped the outcome of the Parnell fiasco might be the reunion of the Liberal party. He said that some reconstruction was evidently necessary, that Home Rule was indefinitely postponed, and that when it was shelved there really was no difference between him and me. . . . Childers said that there were many members who felt seriously the danger of the present situation. . . . I told him that the difficulties I had pointed out were so serious that I was not sure that fusion with the Conservatives was not more likely than union with the Gladstonians and it would certainly be more popular with a proportion of Liberal Unionists. On the same subject Sir Henry James told me of a conversation he had with a Gladstonian (I think Asquith) who said that there must be a

¹ This account we now know to be exaggerated. See *After Thirty Years*, by Lord Gladstone, containing a chap-

ter on Mrs. O'Shea's book, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, pp. 295-305.

reconstruction of parties but that reunion was not possible. He put the Gladstonian strength at 210, of which 150 were Radicals decided . . . to prevent any reunion with Hartington and myself.

CHAP.
XXXVIII.
Æt. 49-55.

Now, as the year of catastrophe for Home Rule closed, he saw Gladstone and Parnell destroying each other. That this was their mutual effect he never doubted. The new situation was made for him.

Upon the dissensions and recriminations of the Irish Nationalists—upon the Liberal refusal to define the future meaning of Home Rule—he would play with devastating ridicule. Gladstone was far out of touch with the social sense of a new generation. His political magic was failing in the country, though in the House of Commons his personal charm was increased in a manner both enchanting and irrelevant.

With a freedom and confidence unknown since December 1885, when his earlier political life was broken and all its dreams thwarted, Chamberlain turned to a new era of destructive attack and constructive appeal. Convinced that the new position more than ever demanded reform not negation from the Conservative Ministers, he, to their discomfort, spurred them on.

CHAPTER XXXIX

UNIONISM AND DEMOCRACY

(1887-1892)

New Social Forces—The Rise of Labour—Chamberlain's Pressure on Conservatism—Five Stages of Achievement—Inner Working of the Unionist Alliance—Free Education at Last—Churchill and Chamberlain—"A National Party"?—Who shall succeed John Bright?—Lord Randolph excluded—Revolt of Birmingham Conservatism—Chamberlain re-establishes the Position—The Radical Unionist as Leader of Tory Democracy.

I

BOOK IX. OTHER forces were changing the colour and dynamics of public life. The period had two characteristics not peculiar to our own country, but answering to general movements in the world.

1887-92.

On the one hand was the Imperial spirit rising to dominant influence in national affairs. On the other hand, by parallel action, advanced democracy began to emerge, claiming a higher standard of life and larger social legislation. The dockers' strike in the autumn of 1889, accompanied by a great outburst of public sympathy, led to the "new Trades Unionism" and to new Liberal and Labour movements. Their time was not to ripen in politics for many years.

Meanwhile, between social reform and Imperialism, two forces formerly thought conflicting, there was now a good deal of inter-linking sympathy. They were substantially associated by questions of markets, trade and employment. Gladstone represented neither of these forces; his chief adversary both. The fresh motives soon began to overpower the lingering Irish Question as represented by the aged Liberal leader. When Gladstone was over eighty he seemed more and more the survivor of the past generation, while the Radical Imperialist, as we may now call

him, stood out as the man of the new era. Time was on his side, not on the other, as Gladstonian Liberalism had assumed at the beginning of the Home Rule struggle.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

This position was approached by degrees and then reached by rapid steps. After the Round Table fiasco Chamberlain's national influence undoubtedly sank for a short period. His intermediate policy between ordinary Unionism and disintegrating Home Rule was neither liked nor understood by five per cent of the country outside Birmingham. Many persons, Conservatives as well as Home Rulers, thought him weakened for good. They had not come near to knowing his fibre. "He began where other men left off." After his marriage, by a progress never again checked through many years except for a bad moment or two, making his way through complications and contradictions such as beset no other man in politics, he became on the Unionist side what he had seemed certain, once, to become on the other side—the most powerful man in England.

For that prize he had to pay his forfeits. In the course of the struggle all his qualities developed and all his faults appeared. The clearest method is to state what he achieved, and then to show by what means and against what difficulties.

II

The secret is that his constructive effort never paused—great combatant in the destructive business of party-battle as at the same time he was. The old Birmingham zest for "improvement schemes" never left him, but worked to the end of his life on a widening scale and at last on a vast plan.

Before undertaking the Fisheries Commission in a gloomy hour, he had uttered his protest against the tendency of Conservatism to sag into its old negative habit. To have secured, in spite of the shock to the Carlton Club, the revision of judicial rents in Ireland was something. This "principle more Radical than has ever been put before the British House of Commons", as he said, was a painful wrench to Conservative Ministers. In the same uncertain year (1887), it was something again—a symbol in itself and an earnest of further things—when Lord Salisbury's Government accepted from Jesse Collings and passed

BOOK IX.
1887-92. into law another Birmingham item. This was the Allotments Bill, giving local authorities compulsory powers to acquire land for the purpose. The Conservatives, though favouring allotments, had denounced hitherto the compulsory principle. So far the spirit of the "unauthorised programme" was continued, not renounced.

Again in 1887, before going to Washington, he enjoyed signal satisfaction in a very personal sense. The Royal Commission on Shipping, after investigating for several years, issued its first report in August. Its recommendations completely vindicated Chamberlain's devoted fight for the merchant seamen in 1884, when nearly all Conservatives as well as Whigs were his unsparing assailants. The earlier pages narrating that struggle have already told how a good part of the life-saving legislation he had proposed when President of the Board of Trade was passed by successive measures of the Conservative Government in the next few years. The Coal Mines Regulation Act, not of the Radical Unionist's prompting, was in the direction he desired. It was admitted by Liberals to be an advance on the ideas of the late Gladstonian Ministry.

All this to Chamberlain's mind was not nearly enough, but only a beginning. When he came back, a new man, from the United States in the spring of 1888, he emphasised his distinctive policy, and pursued it with judgment and ingenuity until Lord Salisbury's administration went out of office four years later. Whenever the Government is in any real danger from the Opposition, it must be supported at all costs. Between those emergencies it must be prodded or goaded. In public he thanked the Government and praised elaborately their concessions to the progressive spirit. In private he badgered them to go further. Whenever they advanced he moved ahead again and kept his own flag to the front. He represented to the Cabinet and his Whig colleague, Hartington, that no peddling and dilatory temper would avail in the constituencies. He saw that conventional Conservatism could never hold the country; that a negative policy would bring about the fall of the Union by sapping Liberal Unionism.

He pointed to the adverse sweep of the by-elections. Every Gladstonian success was both pain and gain to him. He felt it

like a blow. Yet as the Government majority in the House of Commons dropped from over 100 towards 70 his own power rose. Each loss of a Ministerial seat strengthened his hand when he urged progressive measures on Conservatives and Whigs.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

III

To see how the unusual mechanism of the Unionist alliance was more and more efficiently worked through all complications is a classical lesson in political method. Chamberlain was never better advised for all purposes, as well as his own, than when he rejected in 1886 the idea of a Cabinet combination between men who had loaded each other with opprobrium up to a few months before. That resort would have been regarded as the most indecent cohabitation of its kind since the Coalition of just over a hundred years before. A celebrated work, *The Beauties of Fox, North and Burke*, could have been emulated by another delectable anthology of the remarks recently addressed to each other by members of the same administration. A solid and great Coalition came decently and well, nearly a decade later, when sufficient moral fusion had been gradually brought about. Meanwhile the Unionist alliance was a strong and adaptable instrument. From outside, the Liberal Unionist leaders, Chamberlain above all, acquired a more salutary power over the Cabinet than they could have possessed within it. Inner relations between the two wings and their leaders are a study not devoid of amusement, though full of instruction.

The inwardness of the psychological situation is best described in his own matter-of-fact words. His "Memorandum" concerning his public life from 1880 to 1892 is for the most part a dry register of facts and dates seldom lending itself to extended quotation. By exception his account of his relations in this period with the Conservatives and the Whigs is in its bare way a material contribution to history.¹

All attempts at reconciliation and the reunion of the Liberal Party having now failed, the next few years, from 1888 till the General Election of 1892, were occupied in maintaining and strengthening the Unionist alliance. The situation was extremely difficult—especially at

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum", 1888-92.

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

first. The Conservative Party had the old traditions and methods, and were inclined to move slowly or not at all. Lord Hartington, who in 1885 had been the most moderate of Whigs, found little difficulty in accepting a negative policy. He showed no initiative, and was inclined on all occasions to wait for the Tory lead, and at the same time was most destructive in his criticisms of all new proposals and policies.

On the other hand, the Liberal Unionists in the country were restive at the idea of working with, and especially under, new allies. They had been accustomed to look on all that bore the name, or was connected with the idea, of Toryism as altogether unacceptable and detestable. They were determined not to sacrifice their Liberalism, and were pledged to reforms which they had hitherto been accustomed to identify with the Liberal Party. Unless this important section of Liberals, whose sole difference with Mr. Gladstone was the Home Rule question, and who were eager to find a compromise on this, could be kept true, the Gladstonians would speedily outnumber the Conservatives in the country, and would return to power with a majority sufficient to carry their policy.

The position of Liberal Unionists in the constituencies was not a pleasant one. They were reviled by their former friends, and did not thoroughly trust, nor were they trusted by, their new allies. They were without efficient organisation, isolated and uneasy; and accordingly many did go back to their old party, as the by-elections showed; whilst others, less strongly Liberal in their convictions, frankly joined the Tories and ceased to call themselves Liberals at all.

Under these circumstances I felt it was the duty of the Liberal Unionist leaders, in the first place, to exhaust every possibility of reconciliation, and to satisfy themselves that no concessions could or would be made by the Gladstonian leaders which would remove the objections to Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bills.

Secondly, these efforts having been exhausted, it was necessary, if the Liberal Unionist Party were to be permanently maintained as a separate party, that it should be distinctly Liberal as well as Unionist, and should have a positive as well as a negative policy.

Thirdly, it was important to press on the Unionist Government the desirability of giving some satisfaction to the demands for social and political reform which had hitherto been chiefly put forward by Liberals. It would be fatal to the Unionist Party if at the General Election they

could show nothing but a record of blank resistance to Mr. Gladstone's policy.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

So far as the leaders were concerned these objects were thoroughly understood and fairly appreciated. My own relations with them were cordial, frank and satisfactory. Great consideration was shown by them to the suggestions which I made from time to time, and many of them were accepted. Where they were unable to meet my views, they were always ready to admit that the Liberal Unionists would be at liberty, without imputation of disloyalty, to defend their own opinions in the House of Commons and in the country, although of course it was understood that we should not do this in cases in which the supreme object of our alliance and the existence of the Unionist Party would be endangered.

At all times the Conservative leaders had to deal with a certain restiveness on the part of a portion of their more extreme followers, who would have liked to see the Liberal Unionists absolutely fused with the Conservatives and did not understand how fatal such an arrangement would be to the prospects of the common cause.

Personally, and on a great majority of subjects, Salisbury, Balfour and W. H. Smith were ready to take as broad and liberal a view as I could wish, but they were sometimes restrained by pressure from some of their own followers. On the Church question it was always understood that they would stand firm against any proposal for Disestablishment, and I did not at any time press them to alter this conclusion, although I claimed my own right to speak and vote in its favour. During the whole period from 1888 to 1892 there was never any serious difference as to the actual policy of the Government which in the least threatened the existence or the cordiality of the alliance.

It was much more difficult to maintain a friendly feeling between the rank and file throughout the country, or to appeal to either section without running some risk of offending the other; and even in Birmingham difficulties arose which at one time threatened to be very serious.

During the whole of this time the Gladstonians under Mr. Gladstone's guidance made their chief attacks on the Liberal Unionists. The gravamen of their charge was that in joining the Tories we had abandoned our Liberalism, and were compelled by the conditions of our alliance to oppose Liberal measures. In order to strengthen this accusation they lost no opportunity of outbidding all the Government proposals, and of

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

putting forward Bills and Resolutions to which in principle we were unlikely to object, although we might be compelled to vote against them in order to maintain the Government in office.

In the debates arising on these motions cautious steering was necessary, as we had to uphold our Liberal opinions without endangering the existence of the Government; and although the position was sometimes critical, I do not think the Gladstonians on the whole gained much by these encounters. They did, however, undoubtedly secure many votes at the elections by their claims to be the sole representatives of Liberalism and heirs of Liberal policy and traditions.

I was so much impressed with the importance attached to party names that I was led to throw out suggestions in speeches made in 1887 for the formation of a national or central party, which might include the more liberal of the Tories as well as Liberal Unionists, and to which the more moderate of the Gladstonians might be attached. Randolph Churchill took up the idea warmly, but Hartington was cautious as usual, and threw cold water on it. The time did not appear to be ripe for such a movement, although I referred to the matter again from time to time in speeches made in the succeeding years.

From these reminiscences of the Radical Unionist we realise indeed that "cautious steering was necessary"; and how much skill of touch and sharpness of eye he required to wind his way again and again through dangerous intricacies of political navigation. The Gladstonians might well expect with glee, as from session to session they did, to see him run aground or wreck himself amongst the rocks and shoals; and when he always glided through the narrowest channels with no worse than a little grazing and grating instead of coming to grief, his opponents at each disappointment disliked him the more. Much as Liberals, Chamberlain included, at the height of Beaconsfield's power used to abhor the devilish dexterity of "the Jew".

IV

Without entering into details which have long since lost their interest, except for specialising historians, the best way at this point is to give a plain summary of what was done year by year.

I. 1888.—The first success which he could call a signal victory was the establishment by a Conservative Government of County Councils on a democratic basis. Since the time when he had been Mayor of Birmingham the extension of local government throughout the counties on the lines of municipal institutions had been a chief object of his public life; and as much for that purpose as for parliamentary reasons, he desired franchise equality for the agricultural labourers. He had been in close communication with the Government upon the terms of the coming Bill, and for some time was not free from uneasiness when restrictions and precautions were first suggested.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

I had, however, made it a *sine quâ non* of my support that the franchise should be the same as for the Councils in the boroughs, and I referred to the pledges given by Lord Randolph Churchill on behalf of the Government in support of my claim which was ultimately conceded.¹

While he was still in Washington a letter from the Prime Minister relieved his mind on the main point:

SALISBURY TO CHAMBERLAIN

February 1, 1888.—*Foreign Office, Private.*— . . . We have acceded to your views on the County Government Bill to a great extent, putting aside for the present those subjects where they presented the greatest difficulty. That is to say we have adopted the Borough constitution and mode of election for the County Council: but have left the control of the Police with the magistrates, and have not meddled with the Poor Law, or the question of transferring any part of local taxation directly to the owner. The civilisation of many English counties is sufficiently backward to make it hazardous for the Crown to part with power over the police; even if that power should be looked upon as a proper municipal attribute, which I am inclined to doubt. The Poor Law will have to be overhauled some day, but it is a very big job, and may well be separated from this one. Taxation of owners would involve their representation on the County Council: but the construction of an owners' constituency is exceedingly difficult. The Bill will be a thorny one—for our people will be very discontented at the absence of the element of nomination from the Councils: and I look forward to considerable trouble. . . .

The great measure, introduced by Ritchie in March, was

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

framed in a broad spirit on the principles advocated by Chamberlain as a Radical for over a decade and a half, and he was able to give it his hearty support. It would no longer be easy to say that he had become a mere ally of Toryism. Satisfaction was not unmixed. In his own plan, when at the Local Government Board two years before, he had designed to establish District Councils and Parish Councils as well. For different reasons they were not now instituted, and the vestries were left unreformed, against his wish strongly expressed in one of his parliamentary speeches at this time. Nor could he profess to like the provision putting the police under a mixed committee of the Councils and the magistrates.

On another point he and the Government alike met a severe rebuff. The licensing clauses had to be abandoned. In Chamberlain's practical opinion they would have marked a great step in promoting temperance. Powers were to be given to the new County Councils to reduce the number of liquor licences on terms of compensation. Chamberlain, as we know, never had been in favour of penalising individual publicans. His own full plan of Local Government in 1886 expressly provided for compensation. But now against the alleged moral wickedness of compensation the orthodox temperance party raised a storm of protest. They called it Public House Endowment, instead of seizing the opportunity to secure a good deal of public-house suppression. At the same time it happened that Goschen's "Van and Wheel Tax" was one of the most unpopular propositions since Lowe's match-tax and *ex luce lucellum*. Chamberlain wrote to the leader of the House:

I am afraid that the agitation on the Licensing Clauses—with which you know I do not sympathise—has set the great bulk of the Temperance people against us. Goschen's Van and Wheel tax has disquieted and irritated a very large number of small tradesmen, many of them active politicians.¹

To Chamberlain's dudgeon the licensing clauses had to be withdrawn. None the less County Councils stood as a main achievement of "Progressive Unionism". "I am quite prepared to admit

¹ Chamberlain to W. H. Smith, June 27, 1888.

that the Government does not go far enough for me, but I have never found a Government yet that did.”¹

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

* * * * *

II. 1889.—In his private life an unaccustomed period of waiting and of divided attention is over. Married and settled, his mind is free and exhilarated. In his speeches at the beginning of this New Year he is at the very top of his form. At Glasgow particularly, during another Scottish campaign, and at Birmingham he recites the practical advantages already gained in both islands; but insists that it is not enough.² The Conservative Ministers have not yet done what their Liberal and Radical supporters have every right to expect from them and what the public situation requires. He demands wider land legislation for Great Britain. In view of all that is being done for Ireland, why not adopt similar means to multiply small owners in England, Scotland and Wales? Why not act in the interest of Scottish crofters and cottars whose case is as sad and deserving as any instance of Irish distress? “Why should not we give our own people a turn? (Loud cheers.)”

Above all, he insists on free education. In a few months he sees it secured for one part of the nation, Scotland; that it will follow for the rest is certain. For in this session—despite some sullen Conservative demur—the plan for Scottish County Councils is an improvement on the southern model, notably in applying nearly a quarter of a million of money to abolish fees in elementary schools across the Border. At Greenwich (July 31) he claimed that every one of the four points of the Radical programme—graduated taxation included—had received some recognition “under this Tory Government”.

* * * * *

III. 1890.—In this year he does not reap much, but he ensures later harvests. In interviews with Lord Salisbury and with the leader of the House, Mr. W. H. Smith, he insists that free education for England and Wales either must be carried in the next session or made a central plank in the Unionist platform at an early appeal to the country.

And 1890 fairly begins that revolution-by-degrees which

¹ At Birmingham, May 28, 1888. ² Glasgow, February 13; Dundee, February 15; St. Andrews, February 16.

BOOK IX.
1887-92. was to transform under successive Unionist regimes the agrarian condition of Ireland. The plan for the redemption of the congested districts was now framed, though not carried yet into effect. More must be said of it. With the decision to postpone County Government in Ireland—which he had hoped to see established in this session on the same popular basis as in Great Britain—he was forced with reluctance to concur. In view of all the parliamentary circumstances, he recognised the present necessity of postponement, but protested against any thought of deliberate delay in the future.

This position made him a critic as well as a supporter of Balfour's elaborate Land Purchase Bill:

April 28.—I supported the Government . . . but on this occasion, and subsequently, urged amendments which would have had the effect of giving greater powers to local authorities in connection with the adoption and administration of the system.¹

With a good deal of Parnell's suggestions in the interests of the poorest tenants the Radical Unionist was entirely sympathetic, but he could not persuade Ministers to share his feeling. The proceedings on Land Purchase and his private representations in connection with it were prolonged beyond this twelve months.

In debate lively engagements quickened the House. Chamberlain had relieved a long speech framed with studious moderation by bantering Harcourt as one "under the unfortunate delusion that everybody in the world was inconsistent except himself". But the Radical Unionist's policy upon Irish Land Purchase in particular had in fact undergone many variations as a result of the exceptional complexity of the subject, and Harcourt for once had not the worst of it when he riposted that Chamberlain had produced "many land purchase plans. They have all been ingenious and remarkable but they have all been different".² We must note that Chamberlain this year, in private correspondence with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, began to press for increased grants to University Colleges.

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum", 1890.

² Hansard, Third Series, vol. ccclxiii. (April 28, 1890).

V

IV. 1891.—At last came a great event to make easier the argumentative position of Radical Unionism. In April the Conservative Budget unexpectedly completed the work of making education free throughout Great Britain. So, under his pressure, an ideal of his political life for twenty years, and a principal article in the Radical programme of 1885, was placed on the Statute-book by “the Tories”. This feat was the Marengo of his campaigns in these years—a victory won by pertinacious audacity not over his opponents but over the grumbling mass of his Conservative allies. A master-stroke for his future purpose of appealing to Unionist democracy, he always looked back to it with happiness. Commonplace enough now, “free education” in the schools for the mass of the people was bold and novel enough at that time. How he brought it about will presently appear.

Nor was this all the harvest of 1891. Owing to Goschen’s too elaborate precautions in the interest of what was then called the Imperial Treasury, Balfour’s Land Purchase scheme did not promise any full solution of the Irish agrarian trouble. Nor did the Chief Secretary set up Irish County Councils immediately to associate them, as Chamberlain urged, with the management of purchase and responsibility for its finance. But again Balfour’s measure, however falling short from the Radical Unionist’s point of view, was not reaction. It was a stride in advance.

Above all, Unionist policy was reinforced when some of the best provisions of humane legislation ever put on a Statute-book were added to it this year—the measures for relieving Irish poverty. Especially in the congested districts, by light railways, new roads, drainage; by supplies of seed potatoes and turf; by providing boats and nets for the fishermen with better facilities for the sale of their catch.

Nothing can dim Balfour’s personal credit for this action, but let Chamberlain have his due. Ten years before, in the Gladstone Cabinet, he recommended this policy on a larger scale. Since then he had pressed it again and again upon successive administrations. It was a principal feature in his “Unionist

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

BOOK IX.
1887-92. policy for Ireland" published in Birmingham three years before as the outcome of unsparing labour. He had never ceased to preach from his text, "Ireland is a very poor country".

More glittering years than 1891 he had, but few more fruitful. Profoundly deficient like other progressive Unionists in his materialistic suppositions about the political effect of economic reform in Ireland, he knew little—no one could know less—of the historical imaginative, spiritual elements of Irish nationalism. Even Gladstone, with all his glowing concentration on the subject, was very far from possessing a sufficient knowledge of that country south or north. As yet Arthur Balfour, with all his sensitive subtlety, was no wiser. When Chamberlain secures free education in one island and the beginnings in the other of a complete agrarian reconstruction, what is most remarkable is the increasing ascendancy of his initiating mind over its Conservative executants.

* * * * *

V. 1892.—In this short session, held in view of an early dissolution, there was not much to be done. The Irish County Councils Bill, with its ridiculous restrictions, was introduced and withdrawn. It was laughed to death. Chamberlain, attempting to defend it in view of the coming elections, was in one of the unavoidable predicaments where for a man of his antecedents and continued instincts it was impossible to shine except in verbal dexterity. Could Chamberlain have had his will, full equality in local government would have been extended to Ireland before Lord Salisbury's Government went to the polls.

In other ways the spirit of the "unauthorised programme" was asserted. Chamberlain—with the help of Jesse Collings—presided over a Committee to find out two things. Why the Allotment Act of 1887, in spite of its clause for compelling the sale of land, was turning out to be almost a dead letter? And how a better attempt to restore peasant proprietorship might be made? The result in this frankly electioneering session was the first Small Holdings Act. The object was to help the labouring man to acquire a modest stake in the soil to any extent from one to fifty acres. Let him put down a fifth of the purchase money and the payment of the rest might be spread over fifty years. Later experience showed the almost complete failure of this induce-

ment. In England more than in any other nation a primitive ^{CHAP.} instinct had been too badly broken. "Land-hunger" in our ^{XXXIX.} country was already a feeble feeling by comparison with the ^{Æt. 51-56.} desire amongst other peoples for individual independence on the soil.

The cause of disappointment lay not so much in the provisions of this measure as in the lack of active impulse to take advantage of it. The social lure and economic suction of the towns proved too potent. Nor was the problem soluble while the unlimited influx of foreign foodstuffs continued under the Victorian system. The question of rooting to the soil a larger agricultural population remains to this day—when at last the conditions owing to the national change-over in economic policy are more favourable than ever they were in Chamberlain's time. He had his whole heart in this cause, and at the time the Small Holdings Act of 1892 seemed hopeful.¹ Amongst the ironies of this period some were attractive. The new Act was brought in by that monumental type of urbane Toryism, Henry Chaplin. As a whole-hearted convert to belief in smallholders, he now became a very Collings amongst the squires.

VI

At the end of the Conservative administration of 1886-92, the Radical Unionist could lay before a working-class meeting in town or country not merely an ingenious case, but a plain one. Partly persuaded, partly constrained, Lord Salisbury's Government had carried out under Chamberlain's auspices much of the proposed Radical legislation regarded by Gladstone, in the autumn of 1885, with distrust or repugnance. Main points of the "unauthorised programme" had been passed into law by the extension of local government to the counties, by free education, by measures aiming to keep the rural labourers on the land and give them a holding in the soil they tilled. At the same time, Ireland had shared largely in the new course of progress and reform.

These results were but forerunners of things to come. There

¹ The Small Holdings Act passed by the huge Liberal-Labour majority in 1908 was equally hopeful but no more effectual to rebuild a race of yeomen in Britain.

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

would be no halting on the Unionist side while he was there. The movement might be less vigorous and broad than his wishes, but he would keep it going. Obstruction had been broken and large work done. Ireland, he said, must not block the way, and could not while the Unionist alliance remained in control. Ireland would only block the way again if Mr. Gladstone obtained the chance to make more years barren by a fixed obsession and a hopeless policy.

This was the gradually prevailing appeal to a changing generation. All, of course, might have turned out much otherwise but for the existence of Captain O'Shea and his English wife and Parnell's *liaison*. Political history, however, is on all sides strewn with "buts", and perhaps they cancel out.

Without give-and-take there cannot be any alliance for one great purpose between forces formerly opposed. Some of Chamberlain's deliberate inconsistencies were a necessary exchange for the similar inconsistencies he exacted from his Conservative associates compelled to move in a democratic direction. This is the process that occurs within every able Ministry when its members make concessions to each other to maintain Cabinet Government. In 1888, for instance, when his new system began, Chamberlain might ensure local government on the most popular basis for Great Britain, but neither his Tory nor his Whig allies would look at his scheme for provincial councils in Ireland, meeting the case of Ulster, any more than at his former scheme for a National Council. "Federalism" for the United Kingdom had to disappear from his projects. This was one of the chief forfeits in all his public career.

VII

Let us look more intimately at some personal elements in the working of the Unionist alliance. With the Prime Minister, Chamberlain was on good personal terms, though their intercourse was not frequent. His relations with W. H. Smith, the leader of the House, were familiar, kindly and very useful. He watched with unstinted admiration the rise of Arthur Balfour in administration and debate:

October 7, 1888.—*J. C. to A. J. B.*—I was quite wrong when I condoled with you on your first acceptance of the Irish office. You have made your mark there as no other man has, or could have done, and among your friends none is more heartily glad than I am. CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

October 10, 1888.—*A. J. B. to J. C.*— . . . Your concluding observations gave me *immense* pleasure. After all it is owing to you and Hartington that we have been able to make headway at all.

With the co-leader of the Liberal Unionists, Lord Hartington, relations were much more trying. Perfect civility and effectual co-operation were maintained between them, but by old habit the Whig jibbed at "positive proposals" from Birmingham, and often was neither to be led nor driven on the forward road. In dealing with him Chamberlain had to learn a sardonic patience never exercised when they were colleagues in a Gladstone Cabinet.

In Arthur Balfour's remedial measures for Ireland Chamberlain rejoiced, but he bitterly regretted that the chance of claiming the credit for Liberal Unionism as distinguished from Conservatism had been thrown away.

On May 28 [1888], at the first meeting of the Grand Committee of the new Birmingham Association, I spoke of the advantages of the Unionist alliance and developed a Unionist policy for Ireland, including public works in the congested districts, land purchase and provincial councils. . . . I had previously strongly urged Hartington to discuss this policy with the Liberal Unionist members, and afterwards with the Conservative leaders, with a view to its joint-adoption as a positive alternative to Mr. Gladstone's policy. Being unable to secure any support from him I desired immediately to publish the proposals in my own name, but refrained at his request. He did not, however, object to the publication as it was ultimately made in the columns of the *Daily Post* and without my signature. It may be pointed out that this policy was subsequently adopted in principle by the Government so far as public works and land purchase and county government were concerned, but the Liberal Unionist party lost the advantages which I think they might have gained from it, owing to Hartington's unwillingness to let it go forth as an official programme.¹

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

At the beginning of 1889, for instance, Hartington writes that he is seeing the Conservative leaders, and though he does not think that much can be added to what is in sight—"I am afraid that you will think it wanting in the element of popularity"—he will consider "any suggestions which you think it is important that I should press on the Government".

Chamberlain answers (January 21) that he is quite prepared for one humdrum session, but they must look ahead "to convince the country that there is a better chance of really popular reform from a Unionist Government than from the Parnell-Gladstone combination". Some Radical changes like Disestablishment must, no doubt, be put aside for the present, but other large things must be kept in view.

One is Free Schools. This must come and if it is left for the Radicals it will come accompanied by the destruction of the denominational system. . . . The other is the extension on a small scale of the Ashbourne Act to Great Britain. Why should not English, Scotch and Welsh farmers have a chance of becoming owners as well as Irish?

He has no real joy in episodes like Mr. O'Brien's fight in prison to retain his own breeches. Though he makes public fun of it,¹ he presses upon the leader of the House, Mr. W. H. Smith, with whom he is always in genial touch, the wiser treatment of Irish political prisoners and some real attempt to help the Scottish crofters. From time to time the Treasury Bench invokes his special assistance in debate. When Chamberlain fears that Arthur Balfour is contemplating a Catholic University in Ireland, he writes to Hartington (September 3): "I dislike taking any responsibility for any new educational and denominational endowment . . . the best I can do is to stand aloof". And we have seen how his failure later to secure County Councils for Ireland in connection with the Land Purchase Bill was one of

¹ At Clonmel prison "the Governor and some warders made their appearance. The Governor told Mr. O'Brien to put on the prison clothes, but he refused, and the warders then seized him and tried to strip him. Mr. O'Brien resisted, but after a while fainted. During the fainting fit . . . his clothes were removed and the prison

suit was put on . . . when he recovered he took off the prison dress and remained without any covering other than his shirt." Afterwards "he wrapped himself up in the blanket but entirely refused to wear the prison clothes" (Clayden, *England under the Coalition*, p. 412).

the necessary cases of "sombre acquiescence" putting a strain upon his masterful temper when his energy was checked.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

VIII

The more was he resolved to have free education and chafed at the prolonged delay. At last, on March 16, 1890, he is able to note that a great thing has happened. He has had an excellent interview with Mr. W. H. Smith. The Conservative leader of the House submits to him the first Ministerial draft of a Free Education Bill and it was "mainly in accordance with my views":

I had some time previously seen Lord Salisbury and pressed him to include this question in his programme. I found him perfectly willing to do so if he could be assured that the change could be accomplished without sacrificing the voluntary schools.¹

Chamberlain gave that assurance and always adhered to it. This, perhaps, was the principal instance of the spirit of constructive compromise which made the Unionist alliance creative as well as powerful. Lord Salisbury accepted one famous point of the old Birmingham Education League; the Radical Unionist accepted at last the permanence of denominational schools. For reasons of cost and peace alike no practical statesman could now dream of disturbing the fundamental national compromise embodied in the dual system.

That in accepting it as an irreversible settlement he acted like a sensible statesman, few to-day would be found to dispute. Many Nonconformists with a lingering feeling for him up to then were shocked by what they called his most flagrant recantation. That their own idea had become obsolete is proved by the fact that to-day, more than forty years afterwards, denominational schools are more firmly based than ever. After all the changes of Government and between parties in the interval, dualism remains the characteristic of the English system of popular education. If inconsistency may be fluid and clever—it was not Chamberlain's kind—consistency may be as stupid as rigid. Chamberlain had not recanted. He had learned. He had lost his

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

acid animosity of twenty years before against the Church of England. For reasons totally unconnected with politics he had long ago ceased to think that Unitarianism or any sect whatever supplied a satisfactory answer to the enigmas of life and eternity. Still, and always, he held that common schools with the right of entry at stated hours for all denominations to instruct in definite faith the children of their adherents would have been the better system. But he saw that to this view the English people never could be brought. They preferred to let sleeping dogs lie rather than arouse another fury of theological barking.

He said his say when opening new Board Schools in Birmingham:

At the present time the number of denominational or voluntary schools has enormously increased. I don't think the nation is prepared even for their painless extinction. . . . The School Boards would consequently have thrown upon them the necessity of providing for all the vacant places that would be caused by the withdrawal of the voluntary system. At the present moment they would have to make provision for three and a half millions of children at a cost which certainly for buildings alone would not be less than £35,000,000 sterling and . . . the annual provision . . . would certainly not be less than £5,000,000. . . . I confess I have come to the conclusion that we must take things as they are and that the denominational or voluntary system having grown as it has, having extended to these enormous dimensions, . . . no practical statesman would dare to propose a measure which would be followed by the immediate withdrawal or extinction of this system. . . .

In the same speech he showed how far in the interests of national education itself he was looking beyond the party quarrels of the day. He hoped he might live to see in Birmingham the establishment of "a true Midland University".¹ This too he was to realise a decade later.

In the summer of 1890 another sound Unionist proposal to secure a real reduction of licences by compensating publicans had to be withdrawn. Goschen, in his Budget for 1890, sought to reintroduce the principle in a new way. Another tempest was raised by the zealots, who would not consent to promote temperance by buying out publicans in practice instead of

¹ At Birmingham, May 25, 1888.

stamping them out in dreams. Firmly believing, in the spirit of his former Gothenburg plan, that these clauses would have reduced the number of drinking-houses and promoted temperance, Chamberlain in this affair was more stubborn than many Conservatives:

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

I had advised the Government to summon a meeting of the party and to endeavour to push them (the licensing clauses) through, but after consideration the Cabinet came to the conclusion that this would be unpopular with many of their own friends, and that it would be better to abandon them [the clauses] altogether.¹

Later he records:

Thursday, June 19, 1890.—Saw W. H. Smith in his room and again discussed situation. He said that they could not count on the support of their men for strong measures. I said that my opinion remained the same, viz. that the only way to get out of the mess was to fight through it.²

But Ministers gave in, and were damaged by a second fiasco on the same subject.

In interviews about the same time, with his old enemy Goschen, he presses on the Government his proposal to stop the sessional massacre of the innocents by carrying Bills straight forward from one session to another. The Government did not dare, for the opposition threatened to prove too stubborn.

There is an entertaining note in his Occasional Diary at this period. Referring to his favourite plea for setting up Irish County Councils in association with land purchase, he makes this entry:

November 26, 1890.—Saw Balfour at Irish Office respecting concession suggested. He said he did not like it, and would almost prefer it should be forced upon him, but he admitted my claim to consideration and desired to meet me if possible.

In this case, like Saladin foiling Richard, the Chief Secretary eluded what he did not like. In the period following Parnell's fall we find Chamberlain incessant in urging that the purpose of a progressive Unionist policy for Ireland must not be relaxed because of the disruption of the Irish party and the temporary paralysis of the Opposition in the House of Commons. Perhaps

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum."

² Chamberlain's Occasional Diary.

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

his characteristic part in the working of the Unionist alliance is most aptly illustrated by a letter to his Whig colleague:

TO HARTINGTON

November 21, 1890.— . . . I am uneasy about two things:

1st. Are the Government going to alter the Land Purchase Bill in any way to meet my views and those expressed by Parnell, as to the necessity of associating the Local Government of Ireland, when it is established, with the proposals for purchase? It is not decent to insist on engaging the rates and the contributions from the Exchequer without giving the local authorities some voice in the matter. . . . If the Government have finally decided to do nothing—then I must ask you and them to consider that my responsibility is discharged. I do not think I can offer any further support to their measure or take any part in the debate, unless the Opposition propose an amendment in my sense, when I must support it. In any case I will strive to prevent my abstention or action from doing any injury to the Unionist cause or the general position of the Government.

2nd. As to Free Education. . . . Can they (the Conservative Government) afford to shelve the question? I think not. They will have a sufficient surplus, and if for the second time they devote it to other purposes, no one will be able to pretend faith in their sincerity, and there will be a tremendous defection of working-class votes both in towns and in the counties. The dilemma is a serious one.¹ I have always foreseen it and have urged that free education should be kept if possible to the last moment and then be included, without the details of a Bill, in the programme for the dissolution. I fear this is now too late. The Government have really committed themselves, and, unless they can hide away the surplus, they must deal with it in the next Budget. There is only one alternative—namely, to introduce the Land Purchase and Local Government Bills simultaneously and then, at the first appearance of obstruction, to declare that the purpose of the Opposition factiously to prevent business is so evident that there is no alternative but a dissolution *before* the Budget. In this case free education would be offered as one of the measures of the future if the Government were successful. I need not point out the bearings which Parnell's present position would have on this policy.

¹ The difficulty of securing the interests of denominational schools against the consequences of free education.

There is little doubt that had he been in command he would have forced a General Election in the spring of 1891. With free education as a foremost promise he would have been able to charge into that battle carrying his Koran on the point of his lance.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

IX

Instead, the Government remained in office and accepted his alternative. When a new session was opened towards the end of November 1890, free education was adumbrated in the Queen's Speech. It was financially provided for by Goschen's Budget in April 1891. By the Bill introduced and passed in the summer, fees were abolished in primary schools throughout England and Wales—in board schools and denominational schools alike. We need not disguise that Conservative Ministers were rather consenting than fervent. When Goschen in his Budget speech came to the words "free" education, some voice from the Treasury Bench itself called out "assisted". The Opposition cried, "free, free". The Chancellor of the Exchequer retorted, "I do not object to stand by the word 'free'". The cost would be £2,000,000 a year as from the next September.

This moment was a high light in the parliamentary career of the Radical Unionist. Looking back he might well exult and moralise. This cause, realised at last, was amongst the ideals that had first brought him into public life. For fifteen years he had urged it, in vain, upon Liberalism. After the fifteen years Mr. Gladstone still shunned it when asserted in the "unauthorised programme" of 1885. The Liberals had been confident that this boon at least the Radical Unionist would never succeed in wringing from his new allies. To most influential Tories, still old-fashioned, the abrupt concession was about as disagreeable as dentistry without anaesthetic. Amongst themselves they said and believed—however little they allowed their feeling to become vocal in debate—that abolition of school fees would demoralise the working classes and sap the sturdy fibre of our common people, hitherto invigorated by paying for each child an average of threepence a week out of their means in those days. To many Conservatives the thing was not only a sad surprise but a craven surrender to the unregenerate demagogue of

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

Birmingham. Nothing but concern for the Union silenced or muffled many Conservative malcontents who, with the fullest imaginable conviction, had been denouncing this policy for years. Many Whig Unionists felt misgiving. Hartington was adequately aware of all possible doubts.

All this only emphasised Chamberlain's personal achievement. "Jack Cade" had obtained free education from Lord Salisbury; it was personally presented by "the skeleton at the feast", and with the unrejoicing assent of "Rip van Winkle". In 1885 no political vision of the future could have seemed more fantastically improbable. The situation involved Chamberlain for the moment in plenty of new difficulties—as when Nonconformists charged him with apostasy—but he could afford to revel in them and he did. Refusing to wreck himself, as Gladstonians desired, because of ideas now impracticable which he had expressed in utterly different circumstances, he accepted formally the continuance of denominational schools—now so large a system that no serious politician could face the expense and dislocation of any honest proposal to extinguish it. Those schools were to be compensated by a State grant for the loss of children's fees. That part of the policy caused nearly as much discomfort amongst Nonconformist Unionists as the whole spirit and drift of the policy roused wrath in old Tory circles. Gladstonian Liberals were full of chagrin to see the Birmingham Leaguer of the early 'seventies getting off with it when he accepted free education for all schools under the dual system and baffled attack by answers both discriminating and aggressive. The Radical Unionist felt sure about his future appeal to the majority of the working-class electorate.

After free education, so far as the leaders of the two or three wings were concerned, the consolidation of the Unionist alliance was complete, and it worked without a hitch during the last twelve months of Lord Salisbury's Government. It was like Chamberlain that, when a great aim was attained—no matter how long and intensely he had cared for it before—he never for a moment wrapped himself in satisfaction. At once he pushed on towards some further aim. About the actual achievement of free education there is very little in his papers. He seems to have been incapable of retrospective complacency. He is

already full of a new "unauthorised programme" for the Unionist party. We shall come to it a few pages further.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

X

We must turn from this astute management of the Unionist alliance in Parliament to the very different aspect of its working in the constituencies. Far less smooth, throughout the country, were relations between the rank and file of the two wings. As demanded by many Conservatives, nominal fusion would have meant dire confusion, and a large secession of Liberal Unionist electors. Yet it was hard to make any distinctive appeal to one side without offending the other. Heady partisans of the local type thwarted the judgment of statesmen at the centre and threatened Chamberlain's foundations. Most difficult of all was the Birmingham position, complicated by Lord Randolph's personal claims and political discords.

The chequered intercourse of the pair is one of the remarkable episodes of the time. When Churchill fell, Goschen, ablest of all the Whigs, was the last man whom Chamberlain desired to see at the Treasury in place of the magnetic Tory democrat. For Lord Randolph he had not only more admiration than he bestowed on any other contemporary — *les beaux esprits se rencontrent* — but genuine affection. For a long while after Churchill threw himself from the steeple-top, Chamberlain did not understand that impulse was the spring of Lord Randolph's psychology; and he far over-estimated the power of that statesman to conduct himself with the calculated discrimination and the cold-blooded judgment of opportunities required to make a candid friend dreaded by a Government.

Chamberlain rather thought at first that friendship and alliance with Churchill might have more than the power of the old combination with Dilke, and might rule all. Together they discussed their iridescent plan of a new National party, to be created by dislodging a Cecil from the highest place and substituting a Cavendish. At that time, when his slow sagacity was sometimes animated as never before or after, the Whig leader might have proved himself one of the best of Prime Ministers—

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

pretty certain in that capacity to make larger concessions to Birmingham ideas than he ever would otherwise. They mention it to Hartington, whose reluctance to become Prime Minister is in itself by no means insuperable, but whose lack of enthusiastic ambition is depressing. In the summer after Lord Randolph's resignation and the failure of the Round Table, the hopes of two Ishmaels are high :

June 25, 1887.—Churchill to Chamberlain.—I cannot make head or tail of Hartington's speech.¹ What the deuce is he driving at? . . . I fear the hereditary Whig cunningly calculates upon the mere using of you and me for the purpose of getting the chestnuts out of the fire for the old Whig gang. This latter lot I believe in reality to be more mischievous to democracy than the old Tories. . . .

July 12.—The same to the same.—It is quite useless to try and get Hartington's consent to anything. If the angel Gabriel was sent direct from Heaven to propose a scheme of divine wisdom, Lord H. would question it and go against it. He is essentially destructive. I am certain that he does not mean to do anything for the National Party. . . .

July 13.—Hartington to Chamberlain.—As to a reconstruction of the Government, if it should be suggested, I hope you will consider the immense practical difficulties at this time. The suspension of business at this period of the Session, and a number of us sent down to our constituencies to fight for our lives; and the Conservatives puzzled and perplexed at a crisis they don't in the least anticipate or understand the necessity for; all this is not a pleasant prospect. Surely it is better, if it is at all possible, to keep the present Government in this session, and let a reconstruction come, if it is to come, with more deliberation and time to construct a definite and popular policy.

Yet a short fortnight later, Hartington fears that no propping can uphold the Government. Chamberlain, elated, thinks reconstruction imminent. Then the momentary mirage vanished as swiftly as it had allured; and it never returned.

At intervals, the two men whose equal isolation ought to have induced them to cohere or separate for good, were at logger-heads. Chamberlain in suggesting the Round Table had meant well by Randolph. Unexpectedly that incalculable genius galled

¹ Hartington ignored their speeches suggesting a National party.

him without mercy when his situation was critical enough. Churchill described the Liberal Unionists as only "a useful kind of crutch", and pronounced that the parley with the Gladstonians was "an erroneous and mistaken course". Chamberlain flashed back:

February 2, 1887.—To Lord Randolph Churchill.— . . . Why did you go out of your way on Monday to attack me? You know that I am the mildest of men, but I have a strong inclination to hit out at those who strike me, and my experience teaches me that no private friendship can long resist the effect of public contest. You and I have plenty of enemies. Is it not possible for us each to pursue in his own way without coming into personal conflict? Surely we shall have our hands fully occupied without tearing out each other's eyes.¹

Some months later they clash again. On certain clauses of the Irish Land Bill, Churchill takes a course vexatious to Liberal Unionists (August 1, 1887). Chamberlain answers tartly. Churchill protests against "a characteristic sneer". Denying intention in that sense, Chamberlain retorts that for his part he is not "one who speaks one way and votes another".² Their friendship was soon restored but not the dream of a firm partnership in politics. How, during a walk in Hyde Park, they agreed that each should go his own way, without bating personal goodwill, has been related by Mr. Winston Churchill in one of the best pages of his fascinating *Life of his father*.³ Chamberlain's own note is:

Our differences as to the policy to be pursued were too great to be bridged. Randolph was, perhaps naturally, irritated at his continued exclusion from the Government, although it was, of course, by his own act that he had become an outsider.

He was ready to press the Government in a Liberal direction, but, unfortunately as I thought, he was willing to do this in a way and to an extent which might seriously weaken them.

My idea, on the contrary, was to confine all pressure to private representations, and having gained all that was possible by this means,

¹ This letter appears in *Lord Randolph Churchill*, by his son, Winston Spencer Churchill, vol. ii. pp. 286-287.

² *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 347.

³ *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 348.

BOOK
IX.

1887-92.

then to make the best of the situation in public. On the Land Bill, as well as on the proposal for the Parnell Commission, and again on the Land Purchase Bill, Randolph criticised severely the Government proposals, and once or twice we came into some sort of collision. The project, therefore, of any close alliance came speedily to an end.¹

Their rapiers met again in sudden duel early in the following session. It happened on a Wednesday afternoon in the spring of 1888. Repeating his principle of "Similarity, equality and simultaneity" in regard to County Councils for Ireland, and reproaching the Government for delay, Churchill delighted the Gladstonians and Parnellites. Chamberlain killed the effect in a four minutes' speech of rare skill, and restored Ministerial spirits. When he sat down, he felt with regret, "I am afraid I have once more bitterly offended Randolph. I hope not, because I like him very much, but fate seems to throw us into apparent opposition."² Next day they made it up—yet once more. Chamberlain meeting Randolph on a committee frankly remonstrated with him against the habit of making unnecessary attacks on his friends—"I am afraid it is ingrained, but he received the criticism very well".

XI

The next phase began with the renewed illusion of full comradeship, and ended with an execrable squabble when John Bright was laid in his grave. Tortuous in its course, the affair was very simple in motive. Birmingham would hear Bright's voice no more. As a voice, judges familiar with both thought it had been at its best a more perfect organ than Gladstone's. At the end of May 1888 it seemed possible that he might be compelled to resign. Though he survived for ten months longer, his illness was mortal. Randolph approved the forward policy for Ireland which the Radical Unionist just then was working out. The latter's dream of real alliance with the Tory democrat revived. He wrote enquiring whether, in the event of a vacancy in the Central Division, Churchill meant to stand. The reply was:

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum" for 1888.

² Letter to Miss Endicott already quoted (April 25, 1888).

May 30, 1888.—I hope Mr. Bright will get better. . . . In the event of a vacancy occurring I should not leave Paddington unless it was the strong and unanimous wish of the Tories and of your party combined and unless they were of the opinion that there was real danger of the seat being lost if I did not stand. . . . The seat is a Liberal Unionist seat, and that party has a clear right to put forward one of their own number and to receive a full measure of Tory support.¹

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

On that basis, Chamberlain's personal backing was promised to Churchill if he stood by invitation from both Unionist wings. There is no doubt about this pledge. Chamberlain never wished to deny it. He records:

In conversation with him, and with Sir James Sawyer and other local Conservatives, I had said that if he came forward I would use my influence with the Liberal Unionists in Birmingham in the hope of inducing them to adopt him.²

So matters remained until Chamberlain went to America to be married.

Upon his return the case was altered. He found Randolph employed in pleasing the Opposition and injuring the Government. This both in object and method was the negation of the Highbury method—inexorable in the main purpose of preventing Gladstonian and Parnellite success. Chamberlain, we have remarked, was too confident in himself to fear two kings at Brentford; he relied upon his own ascendancy in strength of character and power of command. There might be two titles: there would not be two thrones. But colleagueship between them in the City would be impossible without substantial agreement in aims and methods.

Lord Randolph reasserted that very part of his policy which had made his resignation a failure, and did this at the very time when Bright's death, known to be near, would create the vacancy in the Central Division. In the House of Commons on March 7, 1889, he attacked the Naval Defence proposals held by nearly all Unionists to be required for national safety and the preservation of the Empire. He proclaimed his hostility to the whole spirit and method of the Ministerial plan for strengthening the

¹ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, vol. ii. p. 384.

² Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

fleet. Chamberlain felt this extent of divergence to be hopeless, and that the assumptions on which his pledge of support had been founded were demolished. He spoke to Churchill in the House of Commons:

I reminded him of my promise and told him that if he stood I would carry it out, but that at the same time I thought it right to say that circumstances had somewhat changed and I could not be certain that his candidature would be successful. He said that he was not going to leave Paddington, which was a safe seat, for any doubtful chance, and therefore he would decline an invitation.¹

This was on March 26, 1889. Next day John Bright passed away.

A hush in reverence of his memory quieted the nation but did not last long in Birmingham.

He was no sooner buried than the local Conservatives claimed his seat. An article in the *Daily Post* seemed to imply Liberal Unionist consent.² An ardent Tory deputation, waving away their idol's political aberrations, went up to the House of Commons on April 2 and with enthusiasm invited him to stand. Their whole hearts were set on it. They had longed for that day. But the condition recognised as vital by Lord Randolph himself did not exist. There was no unanimity of welcome by both Unionist wings. Yet Chamberlain, if hostile, was fettered. Bound by the letter of his promise, he held that the spirit of the understanding had ceased. The issue lay in Lord Randolph's own hands. Eagerly he aspired to succeed John Bright in the constituency he had so nearly carried in 1885. He could exact from Highbury the uncomfortable discharge of a formal pledge. But what afterwards? That was a less encouraging question. Lord Randolph, though in temperamental facility the more gifted man, knew that he was in no sense the harder. Instead of hoisting his standard at all risks he lacked the core of resolution. It was conveyed to him by Hartington that to his candidature Chamberlain gave black looks.³

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

² "... A leading article in which Mr. John A. Bright's claims were frankly but regretfully withdrawn, and in which my candidature was ac-

cepted . . ." (*Birmingham Daily Post*, Churchill to Chamberlain, April 24, 1889).

³ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, vol. ii. pp. 388-389.

While the Tory deputation that afternoon waited in a state of fever, he put himself in the hands of three persons—Sir Michael Hicks Beach, Hartington and Chamberlain himself. CHAP.
XXXIX.
ÆT. 51-56. Considering his uneasy relations with the Government, he must have apprehended their decision, reached in less than half an hour: "We unanimously advised him not to stand, although I again told him that if he did I should feel myself pledged to give him any support in my power".¹ Churchill did not avail himself of the proviso, but succumbed to the advice. It was in its way another tragic moment for him and a raging disappointment for his supporters. Almost flinging him from them, they departed in fury. It had been one of Chamberlain's ruthless days. After hours of anxiety he had extricated himself from a dilemma by throwing into hesitation the more variable nature and bending the weaker will.

It seems altogether improbable that Churchill in Birmingham would have accepted subordination or established superiority; or that an election for a popular constituency would have done anything to remedy that lack of ballast which brought to nothing all his brilliance and attractions. "Fate is temperament." For both of them it was true with opposite effects. Had Chamberlain yielded to the softer and more confusing virtues on this disagreeable occasion, Unionism in Birmingham might have been thrown into chaos for some years.

XII

A flaring quarrel broke out and filled the Gladstonians with rapture. They had never ceased to assault the Midland stronghold by mine and battery. A few months before they had held there, when our dictator was in America, a multitudinous gathering of the National Liberal Caucus. Its parent Harris was publicly welcomed back to the only true fold. Gladstone, at Bingley Hall, made the greatest platform oration of his later life (November 7, 1888). There were lively hopes that Chamberlain at the next struggle would suffer rude defeats on his own ground. If the citadel of Unionism could be breached and stormed the war for Home Rule would be won. Now, by the poetry of retri-

¹ Chamberlain's "Memorandum".

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

bution, as the Gladstonians thought, the two wings of the garrison seemed about to turn their swords against each other.

John Albert Bright, the dead statesman's son, was chosen as the Liberal Unionist candidate. Lord Randolph's stalwarts, Rowlands and Sawyer, denounced Chamberlain and threatened to run a Conservative candidate at the risk of throwing away the seat. Rival charges of perfidy and faction darkened the air. It became advisable for Chamberlain during some weeks to keep out of Birmingham. For once he took no local part, but remained in London, where he could best move the Conservative leaders to intervene. Arthur Balfour was chosen to cope with the tumult, and when he arrived his charm and persuasions carried the day. The Conservatives rallied to John Bright's son and the Gladstonians were crushed by more than two to one.¹

The bitterness was not appeased but exasperated and rankled for years. No sooner was the seat safe than Chamberlain broke silence to defend himself against charges of bad faith. The local Churchillians redoubled the charges. At first Lord Randolph seemed to support Highbury, and on April 20, a few days after the election, telegraphed, "I always declared I would not stand unless invited unanimously by the Unionist party and unless my candidature was considered essential to Unionist interests".

But then he felt bound to defend his followers against the hard tone of Chamberlain's vindication. In a long, passionate, touching letter, though he made no direct accusation of bad faith, he loaded that statesman with reproaches:

My going to Birmingham as candidate or not going always practically rested with you, as you perfectly well know; and you decided, no doubt on public grounds alone, that I was not to go. Now you have had your way—you have seated your nominee.²

Chamberlain was not usually given to stomaching tamely

¹ Central Birmingham
1885, November 24

JOHN BRIGHT (Liberal)	.	.	.	4989
LORD R. CHURCHILL (Conservative)	.	.	.	4216

1889, April 15

J. ALBERT BRIGHT (Liberal Unionist)	.	.	.	5621
W. P. BEALE (Gladstonian Liberal)	.	.	.	2561

² Churchill to Chamberlain, April 22, published in *Birmingham Daily Post*, April 24, 1889.

communications of this kind, but utterly regretting that he had been forced to wound this friend, he replied with scrupulous good temper and eminent good sense, suggesting a conference between the two wings. Randolph telegraphed, "I am much impressed by your friendly and frank communication. Your suggestion appears to be advantageous and practicable and I will do my best to get it accepted."

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

He seemed placated again.¹ But before long, carried away by another mood, he reappeared in the Midlands to deliver orations, admirable had he meant going over to the Labour-Radical movement just then emerging, but suicidal for a continuing Conservative. In reply the Radical Unionist poured scorn when he entertained his constituents to a garden party at Highbury and delivered what was called the "crazy quilt" speech. In one passage he made famous fun: "I daresay you have often seen at a bazaar or elsewhere a patchwork quilt brought out for sale, which is made up of scraps from old dresses and from left-off garments which the maker has been able to borrow for the purpose. I am told that in America they call a thing of this kind a crazy quilt. Well, I think that the fancy programme which Lord Randolph Churchill put before you the other day may well be described as a crazy quilt."²

In retort, Lord Randolph declined to "enter into competition with Mr. Chamberlain for the smiles of Hatfield".³ Hatfield remarked to Highbury that

apart from all questions of compact, I think that the success of such a programme (*from him*) as Churchill has put forward would reduce political life very far below the level it occupies in any country (August 16, 1889).

In Birmingham Randolph had done for himself, but still faction seethed. Conservatives proclaimed that they would not be content until they had three seats out of seven, and would never accept less than two seats. Their journals continually

¹ "Lord Randolph Churchill never considered that Mr. Chamberlain had treated him with any want of candour in this affair. He did not think he had been generous in action or in victory. But he recognised that a natural divergence had opened between them, and this, although acute, was confined

to political and public limits and did not extend to personal relations" (*Lord Randolph Churchill*, vol. ii. p. 395).

² August 10, 1889.

³ *Lord Randolph Churchill*, vol. ii. pp. 403-404.

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

assailed Chamberlain and his friends. He wrote to Hartington (October 14): "The Tories here are behaving disgracefully. . . . If this cannot be stopped I feel inclined to throw up and to lie by for a time." At last a conference between the two wings on the future representation of the city was solemnly held (November 4, 1889). Chamberlain admitted the grievance of the Birmingham Conservatives from a local point of view, but maintained that Liberal Unionists all over the country were largely unrepresented, especially in most of the other great boroughs. With his usual nerve in a tight place, he insisted, above all, upon the national compact whereby Liberal Unionists in constituencies held by them before the election of 1886 were promised the fullest Conservative support.

No local parleys could bring peace. The conference failed to reach a settlement, but unanimously agreed to refer the question to the arbitration of Lord Salisbury and Lord Hartington. These two statesmen took a long time over their work, but a year later (November 19, 1890) they published their award. It was fully in favour of Chamberlain's contentions. But Hartington earnestly advised that the Liberal Unionists in Birmingham should not insist upon the strict letter of their rights. For all that, Chamberlain meant to make concessions when he was compelled but not before. At present "*Je tiens ferme*". Six seats he had out of seven, and the six he would hold until he was surer of the future.

The Conservatives went on protesting, but by degrees he won them over or wore them down.¹

After two years of dissension harassing and perilous for the Radical Unionist leader—menacing him with being ground between the upper millstone of Conservatism and the nether of Home Rule—the two sections at last began to work more closely together. Singular to say, it was not until January 27, 1891, nearly five years after Liberal disruption, that Liberal Unionists and Conservatives in Birmingham held a joint meeting. Then they assembled together in the Town Hall. "There was considerable anxiety as to the result, but the meeting was an

¹ They were not allowed an additional seat in Birmingham until 1898, when Mr. Lowe was returned for the Edgbaston division, Chamberlain being then Colonial Secretary—the Conservatives in the interval having become a solid part of "his own people".

entire success, and marked another step in the progress towards a cordial alliance.”¹

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

Steadily he went on with the work of consolidating these improved relations. At last peace, as we may say, was consecrated when the Conservative National Caucus—then a very popular and powerful body—held its annual meeting at Birmingham towards the end of 1891. The Town Hall, that political temple of the city, was as densely crowded for Lord Salisbury as ever it had been for John Bright or Gladstone or anyone.² On the following day Chamberlain attended the luncheon in honour of the Conservative Prime Minister, sat with him side by side, and proposed the toast of the “Unionist cause”. In effect he declared the Unionist alliance indissoluble (November 25): “It is not for a mere personal or private question that one can repudiate one’s old leaders. It is only when, as in this case, the existence or at least the security of the Empire is in question. Even after the rupture had taken place there were many of us—I was one of them—who hoped that it would be only temporary, who believed that the Gladstonians would speedily abandon the path upon which we knew, and they had good cause for knowing, they had most reluctantly entered; and we looked forward, therefore, to a speedy reunion. If I refer to that now it is to say that since then the gulf has widened and deepened. Now I neither look for nor desire reunion.”

XIII

By this time his own ascendancy over Tory democracy in the great towns everywhere was undisputed. Lord Randolph just then was coming home after his long absence in South Africa. He was yet to have flashes of spirit and effect when he exerted himself bravely against a creeping fate; but no cool judge could regard him any more as a man of the future, and his name was a lessening shadow by comparison with Chamberlain’s. Rarely has there been more pathos in a human contrast. Through the following years the rising statesman and the fading one often dined together, talking over past years and future possibilities.

¹ Chamberlain’s “Memorandum”.

² November 24, 1891.

BOOK
IX.
1887-92.

Both talked of a National party from time to time, but it had become a meaningless phrase. Lord Randolph was full of charm, regrets and contradiction, admitting past errors but unable to follow Chamberlain's advice that he should take for good a plain line on the side of one party or the other:

CHAMBERLAIN AND CHURCHILL

April 11, 1892.—Dined with R. Churchill alone at the Amphitryon. Exceedingly pleasant and friendly. He said that he had learned a good deal in the last few years. Formerly he thought himself infallible, and he admitted that he had made serious mistakes. He had lost some of his old energy and initiative—he did not care for politics so passionately as before and doubted if he should ever take a prominent part again. It was like an old love affair—you could not recall the passions of youth for a former flame. He took credit for having resisted the temptation to attack the Government whose policy he could not in many respects approve. He intended to remain absolutely passive—making no speeches at all—till after the General Election.

Finally, he said that if he was to take an active part again he would have to be dragged into the contest—he no longer wanted to be stroke-oar, though he might be willing to make one of a crew—and if hereafter I said to him that he was wanted and thought he could be useful, he would be glad loyally to co-operate with me—on the other hand, if he was not required, he was content to remain outside and certainly would not force himself on anyone.

Throughout there was a frank recognition of his having been over-hasty and confident in the past, and apparently a real disinclination to the struggle necessary to recover his former position. I predicted that if the Gladstonians came in, he would not be able to resist the temptation to join in the attack and that in such a fight he would be sure to find a foremost place.

August 7, 1892.—R. Churchill to dinner. In an impracticable mood. Went over the old ground, and complained that Hartington and I had left him in the lurch when he resigned in 1886, and had allowed Goschen to take his place. We ought to have supported him—he was the only Liberal in the Cabinet. I reminded him that I had done the best I could for him, although he had taken his course without consulting anyone or even announcing his situation before I heard of it through

the papers. Frankly, I thought he had made a great mistake, had thrown away his own opportunity and endangered the interests of the Unionist party. Hartington and I had to consider the interests of the cause first of all and before any personal claims, but that was now ancient history, and the question was as to his plans for the future. He had another opportunity.

CHAP.
XXXIX.
Æt. 51-56.

If he used his great critical abilities against the Home Rule Government from his own independent standpoint, he might regain the confidence and support of his own party and do the greatest service to the Unionist cause. He said he did not see why he should bestir himself to support those who had practically boycotted him. I told him that the good he would do to himself was greater even than that he could do for his party. The Unionists could do without him, although they might do much better with him, but the question was whether he cared to take his proper place in the front rank of politics or whether he intended to remain only a spectator. I assumed he would not join the Gladstonians. He said he might have done so but for Home Rule, as he had always been a Liberal at heart; as matters were he should not bother himself to take an active part. He was not so young as when he led the Fourth party, and he was not inclined to work as hard for a second spell. He was extremely friendly in his attitude to myself personally, and promised help if I called on him at any time. He thought that the Liberal Unionists should support the Government [Gladstone had just formed his last Ministry] in all Liberal measures except Home Rule. I pointed out that we could not be expected to do anything to strengthen Mr. Gladstone as long as it was certain that he would use his strength to carry Home Rule. Probably he [Gladstone] would find no time for anything else, but if he did we should probably adopt his own tactics when in opposition—and strive to outbid or to amend the measures which we could not in principle oppose.

Altogether Churchill gave me the idea of a man who does not see his way. He can hardly expect now to supplant Balfour, and he is too proud to care for any but the first place.¹

When these words were written the new popular leader of Tory democracy in the constituencies was the Radical Unionist himself. Lord Randolph, though so near his death, was still only forty-three. With continued life and strength, and with

¹ Chamberlain's Occasional Diary.

BOOK IX.
1887-92. decisive force of character like Chamberlain's to break from his party and subordinate thereafter all minor considerations to some paramount purpose, despite similar charges of inconsistency and a like ordeal of hatred, Churchill might easily have become Gladstone's heir as Chamberlain became Disraeli's. Chamberlain had gone through fire and water since 1886, and just because he had dared all the worst that can befall a man in political life, for him the worst was over. Lord Randolph's position had one fatal weakness. On the new issues—national defence and the Imperial movement in its mingled materialism and idealism—he touched the Unionist masses no more. There Chamberlain replaced him, and welded the Unionist alliance by the double appeal to democracy and Empire. We shall now see how this great development came about, and how the second motive entered in full force.

CHAPTER XL

THE NEW IMPERIALISM—"JOSEPH IN EGYPT"— CLEMENCEAU PROPOSES AN "ENTENTE CORDIALE"

(1886-1891)

THE New Imperialist—Never for Isolation—Travel and Foreign Affairs—His Plans in 1886-87 for Turkish and Chinese Railways—"Joseph in Egypt", 1890—Lively Impressions and a Full Conversion—"England must Stay"—A Memorable Meeting with Clemenceau—France in 1891 between Russia and Britain—Clemenceau urges an "Entente Cordiale"—Chamberlain and South Africa, 1888-89—Who is to be the Dominant Power?—National Defence—He advocates a Territorial Army—The Maintenance of Empire—Ideas of Imperial Preference and Federation in 1889-91.

I

IN the autumn of 1889 the Radical Unionist made a lengthened visit to Egypt. It marked an epoch in his mind. Nothing is less true than that it made him, as by the waving of a wand, an Imperialist for the first time. But it crystallised what was still fluid and uncertain in his feeling. It widened and established his faith. A new revelation of Britain's organising power in the East made him whole as an Imperialist. The change of view on Egyptian policy completed a long process.

CHAP.
XL.
Æt. 50-55.

In his earliest Radical days, as the first volume of this book showed, he was not of Bright's school and came under the Palmerstonian spirit in foreign affairs. With truth he wrote to Lord Salisbury shortly before the present important point in our narrative—"I have not, and I never have had any sympathy with the policy of isolation".

We may recapitulate in half a dozen sentences his record on Imperial and foreign affairs while he was the Radical leader.

BOOK IX. 1886-91. When Bright in reprobation and horror resigned against forcible intervention in Egypt, Chamberlain was "almost the greatest Jingo" in the Cabinet, said Lord Granville, with more point than accuracy. He launched the Bechuanaland Expedition to restrain the Boer freebooters and protect the natives. On the latter subject his feelings were strong and generous. A South African statesman saw in him about that period a born Colonial Secretary. In reality, he was no Jingo. In the Penjdeh crisis he opposed the Russophobe war spirit and contributed valuably to peace. But he was all for standing up to Bismarck whenever that statesman in his policy of colonial expansion became brusque and domineering. Like Dilke, he believed in trying by some means to pull the British dominions together.

II

The next episode in this process of development is much more surprising. It will come as a revelation to nearly everyone that as far back as 1886 Chamberlain's interest in the connection between foreign policy and commercial enterprise was not only practical but world-wide.

As President of the Board of Trade in the earlier half of the 'eighties he had become accustomed to watch the whole map. He was concerned about unemployment. Trade had been depressed for several years, especially in coal, iron and machinery. He was no sooner installed as President of the Local Government Board in 1886 than the London riots broke out, and in his view they were another warning that the old days of Britain's uncontested supremacy in trade were over and that the demand for labour was no longer keeping pace with the growth of population. He began to urge on the Foreign Secretary the need of organising new outlets for our surplus power of production.

In a far-sighted memorandum drawn up for Lord Rosebery, he maintains that Britain, turning to account her unrivalled Indian experience, should take a timely lead in constructing on the largest scale the Chinese railways that must come some day.¹

¹ The Memorandum on Chinese Railways is dated "February 1886" and seems to have been completed at the end of that month.

Not shrinking from colossal projects, he contemplates loans to the total of £500,000,000 spread over twenty years. He argues that with no responsibility to the British Government beyond approval and encouragement, the sums successively required could be found in the City; that in view of the low prices of materials at that time, and of the cheapness of Chinese labour, the scheme would pay, to the immense advantage of British industry and the Chinese people.

CHAP.
XL.
Æt. 50-55.

No one in his generation had a bigger conception of its definite kind—a scheme still unfulfilled, essential alike to the political unity and the economic development of China:

The British Government might at the request of the Chinese Government nominate a Commission of Engineers of the highest character and experience to survey the country and to report to the Chinese Government as to the best lines for main routes, and generally as to the whole subject of railway communication in China.

That Cabinet, engrossed with Dublin, had no mind for Peking or for the future of British industrial employment. They could not attend to these ideas of world policy in business any more than to his complete Local Government plan for County, District and Parish Councils.

The receipt of the Chinese memorandum was acknowledged with a little deprecation by Lord Rosebery on March 10, 1886. A decade later the general scramble for Chinese railway concessions found British policy unprepared. Amongst public men no one approached Chamberlain for active prescience in practical affairs.

When out of office towards the end of this same year of Liberal disruption he turned his mind to Turkish railways. In his interview with the Sultan on November 5, 1886, he soon brought the conversation to this subject, representing to Abdul Hamid that the Ottoman Empire both in Europe and Asia must provide itself with civilised communications. From his full notes of the colloquy the following chief points emerge:

Chamberlain.—The attacks upon Turkey are made because she is weak and her power of existence is impaired because she is poor. She can never hope to be either rich or strong if she rejects the means by which other nations have become so. Asia Minor is a mine of wealth almost

BOOK untouched. The fruit, the grain, the minerals of the country are useless
IX. because there is no means of getting them to market.
1886-91.

The Sultan.—My Government has been unfortunate in the past in the arrangements made with foreign speculators and has been overreached and deceived. The Turkish Government has proposed a scheme of railways but unfortunately has not received any satisfactory offers from responsible, respectable people.

Chamberlain.—I have been informed that the Turkish Government insists on a line to Diarbekr, a strategic line which they wish to have contracted for before any other. If this is so, the ill-success is accounted for. Financial houses and contractors care nothing for strategy, but only look to commercial success. I suggest that the proper way is to arrange for the commercial lines first. Some competent engineer of European reputation should be employed to report. If his report is favourable I think there will then be no difficulty in finding capitalists to engage in the affair.

The Sultan.—I thank you for the suggestion. It is valuable. I am inclined to adopt it. I am desirous to make progress in this question.¹

After this conversation the English statesman submitted to the Porte a very clear-headed and persuasive document, insisting above all on the development of Asia Minor. In a word, he anticipates fully the thoughts which presently led Germany to the Bagdad Railway scheme, with its bearings on the fate of the world in 1914, just after our statesman of action—already long and sadly removed from the sphere of public energies—breathed his last. Returning home, Chamberlain gets into touch with the veteran engineer, Sir R. M. Stephenson, who had a gigantic dream of railways from Constantinople to India and from Calcutta to Peking. In this way the Chinese and Turkish plans come together. But in these spacious visions of the advancement of British trade and enterprise our ex-Minister soon finds that he is before his time, at least in his own country. A decade later the nations began to ring with the questions of Chinese and Ottoman railways. Then Britain with all her wealth had neglected opportunities to an extent that never could be made good.

¹ Chamberlain's notes of his long interview with Abdul Hamid, Constantinople, November 5, 1886.

He does not confine his attention to the material side. After his journey through Greece he is more than ever pro-Greek. He forms a lasting friendship with M. Tricoupis, who through years afterwards appeals to him in Hellenic interests. At the same time, he is convinced that the newest of restored nations, the Bulgars, are a hard-grained people who will make their way. Upon Balkan affairs in general he corresponds with our great Ambassador of that time at Constantinople, Sir William White. Wherever Chamberlain goes his buoyant energy stirs the air. Much might be quoted from the documents, but we must content ourselves with one entertaining extract. With trepidation Yildiz replies to the spirit of Birmingham. Abdul Hamid's Secretary indites:

CHAP.
XL.
ÆT. 50-55.

January 4-16, 1887.—The various schemes hitherto submitted to the Porte for the construction of railways in Turkey have been rejected in consequence of their containing objectionable conditions. If therefore Mr. Chamberlain's memorandum, or the scheme therein mentioned, is likewise open to objection, it will naturally place his Majesty [Abdul Hamid] in a difficult position. Under the circumstances, I am further commanded to state that His Imperial Majesty will accept with pleasure Mr. Chamberlain's memorandum, should this document present no inconvenience, and be calculated also to lead to the real interests of the Empire. (Signed) Sureya, First Secretary to His Imperial Majesty the Sultan.

Chamberlain, whenever he had the chance to gad abroad, was an insatiable traveller and sightseer with an unbounded capacity for enquiry and enjoyment. Had leisure allowed, he would have travelled the world and visited India, China, the Antipodes. It was impossible for him to make new acquaintance with any country without carrying away definite ideas as well as vivid impressions. Most of Europe he already knew. He had been stirred by the United States and Canada. But he had yet to find himself in a stranger scene and to witness British administration at work in the East. Profound and lasting was the effect upon his mind and opinions of his visit to Egypt. He was still only fifty-four, and to the end of things he never went stale.

III

BOOK IX.
1886-91. Let him give a few human glimpses of himself before we come to the political results. Leaving England in November, they were a happy party—Mrs. Chamberlain, “Sancho Panza”—Jesse Collings—but not Austen, whom he missed. His letters to his eldest son cannot be given at length, but a few passages may indicate:

TO HIS SON AUSTEN

November 1889.— . . . We had a lively time at Venice and enjoyed it thoroughly.

Here I am at Cairo as at Constantinople¹ laid up at the outset by an attack—which promises to be very slight—of my old friend the gout. It is rather provoking but it is no use kicking against the pricks. . . .

Three hours’ journey through the richest part of the Delta. . . . It beats Constantinople hollow for the fullness of its Eastern life. . . . Continuous streams of natives, working in the fields, walking by the road-side, attending strings of camels, mounted and on foot—some on camels, some on bullocks, some on horses and many on donkeys—clothed, when they were clothed—for we saw two men working stark naked—in every conceivable caftan, burnous or other drapery, with turbans in infinite variety. . . . A most novel scene and very gay and animated. . . .

December 6, 1889.—We start on the Nile to-morrow morning and I hope the change will finish my cure. . . . We saw the Khedive to-day and were graciously received.

Luzor, December 17, 1889.— . . . I have almost forgotten that there is such a person as Gladstone. . . . I hope the flowers are doing well—roses and orchids especially. At this time there are very few flowers here—the most remarkable being great bushes of Poinsettia in Cairo. . . .

Kalabshek on the Upper Nile, December 30.— . . . I do not think much of Egyptian temples and Egyptian art—they bear no comparison with what we saw in Greece—but the scenery is more interesting than I expected, and is different from all I have seen before. . . . If the English occupation is maintained, I have no doubt as to the future of Egypt. If we come away before our work is firmly established, the country will go back again in a few years to the old conditions of corrupt and arbitrary

¹ Three years before.

administration. My conclusion is therefore that I hope we shall stay, in spite of Mr. Gladstone. . . .

CHAP.
XL.

Æt. 50-55.

Luxor, January 2, 1890.—Collings has recovered marvellously, and is really himself again, full of life and spirits. To-day he came after the party to Karnak, and made his appearance riding in state on a white donkey and preceded by a native piper, whom he had hired for the occasion, and followed by a crowd of grinning Arabs. Politics are tabooed here—we read the papers but do not find them interesting, and the talk is exclusively of Egypt and hieroglyphics. . . . A Greek canteen-man at Wady Halfa told the officers that I was “very good man—very good man for Greece. There was Canning and Lord Byron and Mr. Simberlain—they all very good men for Greece.”

One who was with him gives a convincing account:

It was characteristic of him that while he was so absorbed in the modern aspects of this ancient land, its history and antiquities appealed to his imagination, and he never tired of exploring its monuments and ruins, seeing all that was to be seen and hearing all that was to be said, always bringing to bear on them his quick intelligence and often amusing the party by his humorous comments on the manners and customs of the ancient Egyptians. These qualities made him the most delightful of travelling companions, and his love of sight-seeing in the best sense added to the pleasure and profit of whoever accompanied him.¹

Though the life and soul of the party, he had not shaken off the gout as completely as he hoped and never was wholly out of pain. Heroic in dealing with the old enemy and detesting slackness perhaps more than any other human weakness, he only put on a cloth boot in the last extremity. Mostly he thrust his foot into a stiff boot for discipline and behaved as usual.

But his mind and activities were chiefly excited by the social and political problems. Life was more to him than monuments, and progress more than antiquity. Irrigation engaged him more than pyramids; justice and taxation more than the Sphinx. Sir Evelyn Baring, as a living Pharaoh in disguise, interested him far more than august mummies in the Boulak Museum. On the voyage from Venice to Alexandria he thought aloud. He admitted his full share of responsibility for the original British

¹ Mrs. Chamberlain's Notes.

BOOK IX.
1886-91. descent on Egypt. Had he been right afterwards in demanding, at any risk to the bondholders, speedy evacuation? He had then in view self-government, the benefit of the fellaheen, better relations with France. But had he been right? Was Egypt yet capable of efficient self-government for the benefit of the fellaheen? Could Britain yet leave, without the certainty that some other foreign Power would control the country and the Canal?

When he landed he set himself above all to answer this self-questioning, and needless to say he spared no pains. By what he saw with his own eyes he was frankly amazed. The famous "race against bankruptcy" had been recently won. The repairs to the barrage were almost completed, and he might well think it the best amongst all the monuments old and new. He cross-examined our experts in every branch, and made careful notes. He probed civil administrators and soldiers, engineers and financiers. He was taken to see the Khedive by Baring himself. He talked to the British Agent about everything; to Scott Moncrieff about irrigation; to Caillard about the Customs; to Johnson Pasha about the police; to Grenfell and Kitchener about defence and the dervishes. In a long talk Kitchener maintained that the Sudan must be reconquered one day. The visiting statesman listened intently to that practical soldier and put searching questions. Soon he said, "By Jove, I believe he is right".

In the same way Chamberlain talked with high and low to get the native view. He saw Riaz, then Prime Minister, and Nubar who had preceded. He attended the native Courts; discussed taxation and justice with mudirs and kadis; talked agriculture with owners of estates; and sought eagerly to learn the real feelings of the peasants. At Wady Halfa the troops were paraded for him. Above all, he was delighted on the Nile with England's young men—military and civil.

In short, the upshot was his settled conversion to the view that Britain, for the advancement of the country and for her own Imperial security, must at all costs remain in Egypt for a generation. But how careful he was of the interests of the people, how sharp to detect mistakes and lingering abuses, how little carried away by egotistical Imperialism, appears in a masterly letter he addressed, on leaving Cairo, to Sir Evelyn Baring.

The whole document is too long for these pages but would

well bear printing in full. He rejoices in what he sees accomplished and hopes that much more may be done. He is convinced that taxation can be further reduced and the method of collection improved in some details. He does not think our administration of justice equal to our signal success in irrigation. The Courts are too slow and costly for oriental needs; the native judges still timid in many cases and open to influence. The police system, feeble, he thinks, in dealing with crime, appears to him the least satisfactory feature of Egypt under our rule, and he makes specific suggestions for improvement. He writes as what he is—the former governor of a great city who has had to give attention for years to police, crime, education, water supply and every other aspect of social life.¹

CHAP.
XL.
ÆT. 50–55.

IV

He came home resolved to resist to the utmost the demand of most Liberals for an early evacuation of Egypt. His frequent speeches on the subject brought him into sharper conflict than ever with Gladstone and especially with John Morley, a zealot for withdrawal, who henceforth detested Chamberlain's Egyptian doctrines almost more than his Irish opinions. The Radical Unionist first opened his mind to his Whig colleague:

TO HARTINGTON

Paris, February 6, 1890.— . . . I saw yesterday that you had started for Cairo. . . . If you go there I hope it will be warmer than when I left—but above all avoid the tropics, for it was bitterly cold in Nubia, and I believe that the Equator has got a cant, and is going rapidly towards the poles. Sydney Smith would call this speaking disrespectfully of the Equator but I really cannot feel any respect for an imaginary line which marks the centre of a torrid zone where the thermometer is at 50°. . . .²

40 Prince's Gardens, February 10, 1890.—I left behind, with Baring, a long letter containing my impressions of the situation in Egypt. On

¹ Chamberlain to Baring. There is no date upon his copy in his own hand of this very long and elaborate letter, but it must have been written at the beginning of February 1890.

² The present biographer has passed through the Red Sea when it was as chilly as our winter and grey as the Hebrides.

BOOK
IX.
1886-91.

the whole, I think our people have done wonders, especially with the army and the irrigations. You ought to see a review of the former—it is extraordinary what Grenfell and his officers have made of unpromising materials. The weak spot at present is the police and justice, but all that is required to set this straight is a dozen or a score more Englishmen of the same kind as those now working with Grenfell and Scott Moncrieff.

March 2.— . . . I have no doubt that Baring will show you the letter I wrote to him before leaving Egypt. I have not had an opportunity of seeing Lord Salisbury yet, but when I do I shall certainly urge upon him a more decided attitude with regard to the French. We have got to stay in Egypt for an indefinite time, and we ought not to allow the French to hamper our policy at every turn. I see you have visited the barrage, and I have no doubt you will share my admiration of what Moncrieff and his subordinates have done in a short time in connection with irrigation and drainage. If we only had full control of the finances and could reduce the interest on the debt, and so obtain the means to lessen the burden of the land-tax, we should be the most popular conquerors that Egypt has ever had. . . .

In this spirit he meant to speak publicly at the first opportunity, and on March 24, 1890, addressed the nation from Birmingham. He told his constituents how he had viewed the great relics of a marvellous past and seen pictured with incomparable intimacy the domestic and working life of a remote age. Then he described how against our will we had become strictly responsible for this wonderful land. He avowed that while he had once looked forward with earnestness to an early—it might be even to an immediate—evacuation, his recent visit had convinced him that honour and duty bade us stay. This speech exerted an immense effect on his audience and a strong influence on the country. From that moment he stood out as the leader of the new Imperialism. In this character and on this subject he definitely arrested the rate of Gladstonian progress in most great towns and centres of commerce.

Of foreign affairs in general he said little in public for some time. In private he lost none of his interest. The period had

become critical—terrible in tendency as we now know. Bismarck had fallen. The fulminating personality of the young German Emperor disquieted all Europe. Lord Salisbury by the Anglo-German convention had ceded Heligoland for Zanzibar—and for appeasement, as he hoped. His wise management negotiated with France, likewise, a conciliatory agreement, renouncing claims in Madagascar for the benefit of Nigeria.

CHAP.
XL.
ÆT. 50-55.

But in the summer of 1891 the reception of the French fleet at Cronstadt marked the open beginnings of a new and portentous situation—the two camps—the Dual Alliance against the Triple Alliance. Armaments had been accumulating on an unparalleled scale. Many expert observers in European capitals believed that the Great War would break out in 1892.

Scattered now was the little Radical group of the 'seventies, to which Dilke and Morley had belonged, all of them attached to France. One survivor of the set, Admiral Maxse, remained Chamberlain's adherent and kept up his own intimate friendship with Clemenceau, the French leader whom all of them once regarded as one of the likeliest men of the future. Morley had come to regard Clemenceau as a "light-weight". So far the *tombreur* of Ministries had not reached the responsible power that when they were all younger he was expected speedily to attain. But the same thing might have been said of Chamberlain, who had come much nearer the goal, had almost touched it, but in his prime was excluded from office for nearly ten years.

At this ominous turn of European affairs Clemenceau was as anxious as well-informed. In Paris he entered into serious conversation with Maxse. For every reason he dreaded dependence on the Tsardom. But French isolation could not continue. His policy was peace. He desired to settle with Germany by recovering part of Alsace-Lorraine and creating a neutral zone. On these general ideas would England, in return for a free hand in Egypt, including full liberty to declare a Protectorate, disassociate herself entirely from the Triple Alliance and give moral support to France?

As a result of this enquiry the French statesman came over from Paris for full discussion with Chamberlain, whom for a long time he had not seen. They met on Tuesday, July 7, 1891, at 17 Wetherby Gardens, Maxse's, through whom every-

BOOK
IX.
1886-91.

thing had been arranged. As we know, it was all too late. The Cronstadt fêtes were approaching: the Dual Alliance had become ineluctable. But there were not two keener political wits in Europe than the French Radical and the English Radical Unionist. The long talk after dinner throws a flood of light upon the psychology of European history at this critical moment. Chamberlain's account, written down at once, must be given nearly in full:

CHAMBERLAIN AND CLEMENCEAU

Clemenceau.—He gave at some length a résumé of the situation and expressed his regret that France was now in a position of isolation. No alliance with Russia was seriously possible or likely to be permanent. There could be no real sympathy between the Republic and an autocrat. The only alternative for France was friendship with Germany or friendship with England. The former could only be purchased by abandoning all hope of the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine. This France could not do without such loss of honour and dignity as no self-respecting nation could contemplate. There remained then England. At present there was great irritation against England in France, but it was very superficial and, if a satisfactory arrangement could be made, the nation would approve and ratify it. The two points of contact at present were Egypt and Newfoundland. In neither were any very great interests concerned, although in the former there were sentimental considerations which made concessions difficult. This he would confidently assert, that both questions might be settled in our favour—a free hand given in Egypt and an arrangement made for the extinction of French rights in Newfoundland—if a *quid pro quo* could be found in moral support to France in her natural desire to make some satisfactory arrangement with Germany.

Chamberlain.—I said that I heartily desired a cordial friendship with France, and regretted the policy of *tracasserie* pursued in Egypt and elsewhere, which had alienated English sympathy. We had perforce been driven to seek an understanding with Germany by finding France everywhere unreasonable and irritating. I appreciated the feeling which made it impossible for France to resign herself to the loss of her provinces, and felt that permanent peace and disarmament were impossible as long as this strained situation continued—but I did not see what we could

do. If we asked Germany to restore the provinces or to give up or neutralise any part of the conquered territory, we should probably be told to mind our own business. I supposed he would not accept a fruitless application of this kind as a sufficient *quid pro quo* for Egypt and Newfoundland. We might offer in exchange some concessions in Africa or recognition of rights elsewhere *ejusdem generis*—for example in Tunis or Madagascar, and if there were any such concessions desired by France they might form the consideration for her change of policy. What more did he want?

Clemenceau.—When he had first spoken of the matter to Maxse, the Triple Alliance had not been signed [renewed], and he had thought it possible that we might tender advice to Italy which would keep her from renewing it. Now it was too late and he was at a loss what to say. He assumed that there were no positive engagements between England and Italy but were there any understandings? Would England in the event of war prevent France from landing troops in Italy?

Chamberlain.—I said that there could be no formal engagement, but it was evident that England could never see without objection an alteration in the balance of power in the Mediterranean.

Clemenceau.—The French would give the most explicit guarantees in no case to assail the integrity of Italy or to take Italian territory. If, however, Italy attacked France it would be the policy of France to land troops to prevent the mobilisation of the Italian Army and perhaps to assist revolution.

Chamberlain.—I then asked again in what way could we assist France to secure a settlement of the Alsace-Lorraine question if we were not to give material support. Would a declaration of neutrality be sufficient?

Clemenceau.—A treaty might be made pledging England to strict neutrality in consideration of a guarantee that France would in no case attack the integrity of the Italian Kingdom nor be the first to declare war. In this case the Egyptian and Newfoundland questions could be settled according to our [England's] wishes.

Chamberlain.—I asked him if he wished me to report what he had said to Lord Salisbury.

Clemenceau.—He agreed but said I must distinctly understand that he came as a private individual and without authority. At the same time I might understand that important members of the [French] Government knew of his visit and would be informed of what had passed,

BOOK IX. and further that I might be assured that such an arrangement as that suggested would be possible and even popular in France. If it were made he would desire that we should use our good offices with Italy and secure her neutrality also.

1886-91.

Chamberlain.—I pointed out that this could not be made in any case the subject of agreement previously, though, if Italy knew that England would remain neutral, it was probable that she would think twice before provoking war.

Clemenceau.—[He] repeated several times in the course of the conversation that he did not desire nor anticipate war with Germany, but wished that France might be in a position to negotiate with some chance of success instead of remaining isolated as at present without even moral support from any other Power.

Chamberlain.—I then asked him if I rightly understood his proposition to be:

1. A free hand in Egypt with some provisions to meet reasonable French susceptibilities, as for instance in regard to French schools and privileges of French subjects.
2. Extinction of French rights in Newfoundland with fair compensation to France in Africa or elsewhere.
3. Guarantee of neutrality of England in the event of war between France and Italy commenced by the latter.
4. Guarantee that France would respect the integrity of Italy in all events.

Clemenceau.—Said that I had correctly repeated his ideas and that he had no word to add or take away. He agreed in answer to a remark from me that the present moment was not a favourable one for any negotiations and said that the discussion was one which under existing circumstances must be necessarily *trainée en longueur*.

On this, Chamberlain asked Lord Salisbury for "half an hour when the German Emperor has left England". Alluding to the same trying visitor, the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary replied that "when this tyranny is over-past" he will be very glad to discuss the subject.

At the Foreign Office on an afternoon in mid-July there was a notable conversation:¹

¹ Chamberlain's Occasional Diary, July 16, 1891.

Lord Salisbury said that his policy was to keep absolutely clear of engagements, and to leave the country free to take any action which it might think fit in the event of a war. He thought any attempt to detach Italy from the Triple Alliance would be resented by Germany, and he considered the friendship of the Central Powers of Europe almost essential to us. In Lord Granville's time, in 1884, France was acting in Egypt and elsewhere as the tool of Germany, and, if she was assured of German support and friendship, she might again be disagreeable or even dangerous to us. As long, however, as she was afraid of Germany she would do nothing to injure us. Newfoundland was a small question, and as to Egypt we were in possession and time was on our side. Altogether he preferred to continue like Penelope to wait.

He said that the hatred of Hungary for Russia was the keynote of the Eastern situation; but for this, Austria would come to terms with Russia and draw Germany after her. The action of Hungary was not, however, absolutely to be counted on. He thought the most important factor in the future might be Bulgaria—the character and energy of the people there being astonishing.

I asked him whether he thought the Russian occupation of Constantinople would be as injurious to British interests as was supposed at the time of the Crimean War. He said "No". Lord Palmerston had made a great mistake and ought to have accepted the Emperor Nicholas's proposals. Russia with Constantinople would be more vulnerable than Russia in the Black Sea. But the effect of our policy and the rise of the independent States in the Balkan Peninsula had altered the situation since the Crimean War.

The moment, as Clemenceau feared, was unfavourable indeed to his *pourparlers*. The session was drawing to a close, holidays in sight, members and Ministers dispersing. The journals were full of the Russian famine and the persecution of the Jews. Chamberlain left promptly for a long holiday—in Germany, to which country his sympathies strongly inclined for the next dozen years. A few days afterwards the French fleet, under Admiral Gervais, steered into Cronstadt Harbour. Russian bands played the "Marseillaise", and the *bratinas*, or cups of friendship, presented to the French officers brimmed with champagne. The magnitude and reality of this change in Europe few in England realised. No mortal amongst us conceived that less than

BOOK IX. a quarter of a century later all our own destinies would be staked
 1886-91. on the same side with France and Russia in world-war.

VI

Hearing nothing for several months, the French Radical was piqued. Equally master of tongue and pen, he wrote to Admiral Maxse with perfect irony, and anticipates a famous phrase of later history—"entente cordiale":

CLEMENCEAU AND AN "ENTENTE CORDIALE"

Je persiste à croire que l'arrivée de Gladstone aux affaires promettrait d'accomplir immédiatement ce à quoi Salisbury se refuse—*l'entente cordiale* des deux peuples.—Il faut absolument que nous arrivions à ce résultat pour éviter de graves catastrophes.—La situation s'est évidemment compliquée depuis ma visite en Angleterre. N'est-il pas curieux et, je le croirais, bien significatif, que Chamberlain n'a pas donné signe de vie ? Surtout ne le cherchez pas, et si vous le rencontrerez, ne lui en dites pas un mot.¹

But Chamberlain, relishing the style, knew too well that events and forces had passed far beyond the influence of Clemenceau, destined not to attain full power and immortal fame until well-nigh thirty years later when nearly all his early friends were dead. The Radical Unionist replied through Maxse that he had done his honest best; that the new Franco-Russian alliance "must be allowed to work out the factitious enthusiasm which it has excited", and that French expectations regarding the international results of a Gladstonian victory at the coming polls would prove as deluded as sanguine:

All I can say therefore is that I thoroughly appreciate our friend's [Clemenceau's] generous and statesmanlike intention, and I shall not forget it, but the time is not ripe for taking any further notice of it. I should like him to know, however, that I put Lord Salisbury in possession of his views (*October 15, 1891*).

In a few years the Emperor William's want of balance and judgment, for all his lively endowments, his extravagant

¹ Quoted by Admiral Maxse in a letter to Chamberlain dated October 12, 1891.

duplicity and garish blunders, his naïve crudity as an amateur Machiavelli, ruined both Lord Salisbury's and Chamberlain's suppositions at this time. British diplomacy was compelled to break the German Kaiser's manœuvres for Britain's isolation and naval jeopardy. Events led on at last to Clemenceau's ideal of an *entente cordiale*, and further, to the Triple Entente.

By that time it was too late to avert the world war. When Chamberlain, always decisive for good or ill, would have prevented it by a firm alliance with Germany, the chance was thrown away—through no fault of the German people—by three vain, gifted and shallow men; by the Kaiser, Bülow and Holstein, each of whom secretly considered himself the cleverest man in the world.

We shall have to traverse in this book the irrevocable steps towards Armageddon. At this phase, neither Chamberlain nor Clemenceau had control equal to their frank audacity. In the period of world policy soon to ensue, every Power was led, by emulation and fear, into predatory competition and acquisitive enterprise. It cannot truly be said that the policy of any Power was better than our own. Britain, France, Germany, Italy; even the precarious Hapsburg realm; Japan, Russia and the United States—all alike entered upon a policy of expansion. In the last decade of the nineteenth century the Franco-Russian combination creates the chief embarrassments and hazards of the British Empire. Chamberlain, in resisting that wide pressure, faces the facts of his period. In this sphere also he grows in power, as the chief interpreter and leader of national feeling.

VII

Still more significant for the future was his preoccupation with two other questions. One was South Africa; the other Imperial Union and defence. They were matters interconnected, even inseparable. For the opening up and partition of the Dark Continent were bringing about the new era soon to be known as that of *Weltpolitik*. On both subjects Chamberlain's mind had marched far on before he went to Egypt and subsequently marched further.

Vigilant as had been his concern with South African affairs

BOOK IX. in the Cabinet of 1880-85, he became more intensely interested afterwards.

1886-91. During the absorbing controversy in Britain on the first Home Rule Bill, gold in extraordinary richness and quantity was discovered in the Transvaal. Immigrants swarmed to the new El Dorado on the Rand, and the Uitlanders were soon a large and increasing majority of the population but with no political rights. The Boers, seeking stubbornly to extend their settlements in the old way, continually harassed the natives in territories under our supposed protection. The Transvaal Republic still desired three things—closer alliance with the Orange Free State, independent access to the sea, and German support. Delagoa Bay and frontier disputes embroiled us with our old Portuguese allies. Germany was established on both sides of Southern Africa. As the issue in America had once been whether the Thirteen Colonies should be shut off on the west, the issue now was whether the British sphere in South Africa should not only be barred right across on the north but dominated from that quarter.

All these factors and contingencies were coming into sight when the Radical Unionist delivered an address to the London Chamber of Commerce as early as 1888. In passing, his appearance there has been mentioned, but here we must give it close attention. Missionary pressure had been brought to bear on him as often before. In response to it he spoke on May 14 at the Cannon Street Hotel. He said, in effect, that the discovery of the gold-fields and the new colonial movement had totally altered the former situation. What was to become of the natives under these conditions? What of the great territories still unoccupied but certain to be taken over by some one?

In other words, who is to be the dominant power in South Africa? . . . The policy of successive Governments for a long time has been the policy of shirking. . . . If this policy of shirking is to be continued do let us understand what it means and do let us carry it out to the end. . . . Let us say to all the world that we intend to retire. . . . What would happen in such an event? . . . I venture to say that Prince Bismarck and the German Empire would not shrink from a responsibility which would give them a colony better than anything they have hitherto dreamt of possessing, and would give them access to those vast auri-

ferous and fertile regions which stretch almost into the very heart of the African continent. . . .

There is only one alternative and that is that we should frankly face our obligations and responsibilities. We should maintain firmly and resolutely our hold over the territories that we have already acquired, and we should offer freely our protectorate to those friendly chiefs and peoples who are stretching out their hands towards us. . . .

CHAP.
XL.
ÆT. 50-55.

We have suffered much in this country from depression of trade. We know how many of our fellow-subjects are at this moment unemployed. Is there any man in his senses who believes that the crowded population of these islands could exist for a single day if we were to cut adrift from the great dependencies which now look to us for protection and which are the natural markets for our trade? . . .

No doubt the burthen of this great Empire is tremendous, and the responsibilities and the obligations that fall upon us are greater than those which have weighed upon any other nation in the history of the world. . . . But if we face our obligations, if we perform our duties well and faithfully, the honour and the credit will be proportionate to the sacrifices that we may make; while the abandonment of those duties would be as fatal to our material prosperity as it would be discreditable to our national character and our national honour.¹

There was a prescient instinct here. Whatever else you may think, it is the—or a—*Zeitgeist* speaking. No public utterance by any statesman at that period is more characteristic of the new era of world policy and Imperialism. As chairman of a new South African Committee, Chamberlain henceforward was in frequent correspondence with the Colonial Office. He pressed strongly for the separation of the High Commissionership from the Governorship of Cape Colony; and particularly objected to the combination in the person of Sir Hercules Robinson. That very opposite character was known to object to the policy of northward expansion under direct British responsibility. In a public banquet before leaving for England Sir Hercules declared that Imperialism ought to be regarded as “a diminishing quantity”. Promptly summoned by its chairman, a meeting of the South African Committee passed a strong resolution of protest for private communication to the Government—and the

¹ Speech to the London Chamber of Commerce, May 14, 1888.

BOOK IX. positions of High Commissioner and Cape Governor became
vacant.
1886-91.

CHAMBERLAIN AND SALISBURY

June 1, 1889.—Chamberlain to Salisbury.—Sir Hercules argues against the policy which it is believed H.M. Government have adopted and he attempts to force the hands of the Government by laying down the conditions on which alone he will consent to return to the Cape. We hope there is not the smallest chance that H.M. Government will suffer their policy to be dictated to them by the Governor of the Cape Colony who appears to have gone over entirely to the Afrikaner party.

June 3, 1889.—Salisbury to Chamberlain.—I quite agree with you in your judgment on Sir H. Robinson's speech. I read it with dismay. At Saturday's Cabinet we were unanimous in thinking that Sir Hercules would not go back to South Africa.

In an extensive matter like the declaration of the protectorate over northern Bechuanaland, Chamberlain's insistence at last prevailed over the spirit of the Colonial Office itself. He sometimes writes, to Lord Knutsford's visible discomfort, as though he were already the real Colonial Secretary.

In July 1891 he revealed more of his thought upon a non-political occasion. King Gungunhana—of Gazaland relinquished to Portugal—sent in vain to implore the protection of the "great White Queen". His envoys Huluhulu and Umfete visited Birmingham, and after being made acquainted with the small-arms factory, were received by the Mayor in the Council Chamber. Asked to speak, Chamberlain recalled how the maps of Africa in his childhood showed a vast unknown with the Mountains of the Moon in the centre.¹ Now, the opening of Africa had been chiefly responsible in six years for adding to the British Empire some 2,000,000 square miles of territory. We had gold, silver and diamonds; in Egypt the finest cotton-growing country in the world; we had palm-oil, india-rubber, ivory. These things opened a great material prospect. But expansion ought no longer to be accompanied as too often in the past by oppression, injustice, corruption. "No native ought to be disturbed in any rights of possession he might have had in the land of his fathers

¹ In the early seventies of last century atlases in ordinary use still presented blanks, and guesses as old as Herodotus.

or injured by the accession of white population." We desired only to enjoy the territories and resources which the natives could not use themselves. CHAP.
XL.
Æt. 50-55.

Carried out in that spirit, the expansion of Empire, he maintained, was as beneficial in all ways as imperative for the prosperous existence of our crowded people.¹

VIII

While Chamberlain suggested these practical visions he grasped the seriousness of the inferences. In the more wealthy and dangerous generation then rising—amidst alliances, armaments and world competition for colonies and trade—how were we to preserve that Empire which had increased by more than 2,000,000 square miles in little more than half a decade and now embraced a quarter of the globe? How were we to strengthen it?

For the first time he turned close attention to defence. He, of course, approved the great measures of Lord Salisbury's Government at that time for the thorough restoration of supremacy at sea. As for the military side, he consented at the beginning of 1889 to take the chair when Lord Wolseley, lecturing in Birmingham, declared that the war-cloud would burst some day and that nothing but universal service would meet the needs of the country. The Radical Imperialist could not go so far as that: but he demanded, in advance of his time, that the Volunteers should be turned into an efficient territorial army. "I entertain and always have entertained a horror of shams, and I want to know that this force on which we are relying shall not be an instrument which would break in our hands in the hour of need."² Let the country provide everything necessary to make the Volunteers a real force capable of being mobilised in a crisis and thrown into the fighting line.

Beyond that he asserted in another speech during Lord Wolseley's visit that by some means the British Empire must be pulled together:³

I have no sympathy with these people who seem to think that the

¹ Speech in Birmingham, July 22, 1891.

² January 28, 1889.

³ January 25, 1889.

BOOK
IX.
1886-91.

first duty that a patriot owes his country is to break her to pieces. I desire to draw closer the ties which unite us with kindred races and with the nations that own our rule. And although I have never seen my way to any practical scheme of Imperial Federation, yet I do not deem that idea to be altogether beyond the reach of statesmanship.

I hold it to be right and proper that we should keep it in view and that we should do nothing to prevent it: that we should do everything in our power to bring it about; and as the first step to any such large arrangement I am convinced that the perfection of our means of mutual defence stands in the foreground.

As in his Toronto speech, these are ringing accents of a faith. Since it was not in his nature to have a view without trying to act upon it, these beliefs were bound to lead him far. He was willing to wait, and he waited long. But already—remarkable to note—his mind was working up towards the last thing. He would sacrifice insular free imports at the last, if he could promote Imperial unity by that means and could promote it by no other.

In May 1890, Colonel George T. Denison—long the veteran of the Imperial movement in Canada—was in London.¹ He wrote to remind Chamberlain that they had met at the Toronto banquet over two years before, and requested an interview. They talked earnestly for an hour. Denison urged that the true and perhaps the only line of advance towards closer union between the mother country and the self-governing States overseas was the policy of preferential trade, colonial products receiving a marked advantage in the British market and British manufactures in the colonial market:

IMPERIAL PREFERENCE 1890—CHAMBERLAIN AND COLONEL DENISON

After I had put my case as strongly as I could I waited for his reply.

He [Chamberlain] said, "I have listened with great interest to all the points you have brought forward, and I shall study the whole question thoroughly for myself, and if after full consideration I come to the conclusion that this policy will be in the interests of the country and the Empire, I shall take it up and advocate it".

¹ Colonel Denison, Canadian soldier and publicist, survived Chamberlain and died at Toronto, June 6, 1925.

I said, "That is all I want; if you look into it and study it for yourself, you are sure to come to the same view", and got up to leave; but he then said to me with the greatest earnestness:

CHAP.
XL.
Æt. 50-55.

"Do not tell a soul that I ever said I would think of such a thing. In the present condition of opinion in England it would never do."¹

He had not pledged himself to Imperial reciprocity. He had agreed to study it; that he would not exclude it from his mind; even that he would adopt it in the long run, "if". If he thought it vital to the Empire and within the sphere of possible politics. At a moment when it was not yet for certain the last alternative—when it was wildly impracticable in the mother country—to talk about it would have been fatuous. Years might have to pass. He was under no illusions about that. He would explore every other way of approach towards closer connection; and above all would first try to achieve it on the basis of common measures for defence. But he was resolved that if ever he came to power again he would work with the whole of his being to develop the resources and traffic of the British dominions for the advantage of every part, and to leave a firmer and greater Empire than he found.

We can now understand how he consolidated the Unionist alliance in the constituencies; became the idol of Tory democracy; yet subordinated the name of Conservative altogether; prevailed over the Liberal party for more than a decade to come; and for as many years made democratic Imperialism the strongest popular force.

¹ Colonel Geo. T. Denison, *The Struggle for Imperial Unity*, pp. 146-147.

CHAPTER XLI

QUESTIONS OF CHARACTER—THE CHARGES OF RECANTATION

(1888–1891)

CHAMBERLAIN'S Penalty—An Ordeal of Hatred—Attack and Caricature—The Most-Abused Man in the World—Charges Examined—True and False Consistency in Politics—Chamberlain's Case and Some Others—New Crises and Old Opinions—His Mockery and Provocation—Controversies with John Morley—Breaking Last Links.

I

BOOK IX. 1888–91. AT this point of transition we may pause to study the man himself, in faults as in qualities. There was nothing neutral nor neutralising in Chamberlain's composition. In the case of no contemporary of his at home or abroad are the contrasts more pronounced. No one commanded more applause in the last phase of the nineteenth century, none excited more enthusiasm. Yet also without any exception he was the most hated and satirised man of his time. Whether a political leader in any age has been more hated by his opponents, we may question.

The causes lay partly in his provocative qualities; partly in circumstances which he neither created nor could control; mostly in his peculiar ability to thwart and baffle for many years the great party to which he had formerly belonged. Under these conditions hate to that degree, no doubt, is a tribute to power, as shadow is the foil of light. Gladstone and Disraeli were loathed by their respective opponents. Gladstone himself thought that Palmerston and Disraeli alike showed a distinct diabolism in their proceedings, though he repelled the charge of entertaining unchristian feelings towards either. In the life of

free nations all political protagonists must pass sometimes through storms of obloquy. Towards Chamberlain hostility was a passion with a difference. It was enmity more intense, watchful, unsleeping; armed with every resource of misrepresentation and caricature. CHAP.
XLI.
Æt. 52-55.

When we examine and discriminate, we soon find that amongst the reasons for this pursuing prejudice, the charge of flagitious inconsistency was not the chief motive. By itself that sort of accusation is the feeblest. No freely developing mind, no forward-reaching statesman, can escape it. So far you might as well rebuke science for revising its hypotheses as experiment advances. No mortal is born all-wise and all-foreseeing. Knowledge increases, experience instructs, thought deepens, relativities alter; and it happens to countless individuals between youth and maturity that they can no longer find truth, religious or political, where they once supposed it to reside. Facts and forces change. A policy sound under former conditions may become false under later. New crises and problems may make subordinate—or irrelevant—ideas and principles long held to be paramount.

In these circumstances, essential honesty may not only justify formal inconsistency, but demand it. Stupidity in its nature is more consistent than intelligence. An irreproachable outward conformity throughout life to early or inherited views may derive from dullness, fear or self-interest.

Chamberlain, as we have seen well enough, could claim an exceptional share of the creditable motives for change. As for his self-interest, he hazarded the whole of it in the process—rejecting the certain reversion of the Premiership and forfeiting office for ten years. The former sacrifice, to the nation's loss, was never to be made good to him. It was a final forfeit. The rending of former friendships and connections he felt far more.

II

It was said that he could hardly make a speech in his second phase without diametrical contradiction of some opinion he had declared with pointed assurance in his earlier phase. Just the same was said of Burke, when many of his sometime worshippers

BOOK
IX.
1888-91.

became the revilers of his imputed apostasy after 1789.¹ The Home Rule crisis of 1886 was an upheaval and convulsion in our affairs. Whatever may be the pith and strength of the case for Gladstone himself, his vindication cannot be based upon proof of his singular consistency or of his unique exemption from the fascinations of power.

Chamberlain's opponents employed against him sedulously what began to be called the "deadly parallel". By extracts torn from the context they could usually make it appear to their own side that they answered him out of his own mouth. They revelled in this pursuit. They said that he jumped about like "Jim Crow"—a song more familiar in those days—and turned his coat like a renegade. His announcement that against Gladstonian association with the "Kept Party" he preferred the society of gentlemen was only a single passing sentence out of thousands of sentences in a series of expert speeches; and yet this one banality was a godsend to his opponents, and exposed him to guying and parody without end. He was depicted as consorting with dukes and duchesses, though in truth he did not seek this kind of society and went into it no more than may any eminent man much-invited. As a diner-out through his Radical years in London he was familiar with distinguished company irrespective of party. Gladstone and most later Liberal leaders never shunned the company of the great *noblesse*.

When he spoke of "the People with a capital P" on an occasion to which we must return presently, he furnished more ammunition to his foes than to his friends. *Punch*, once his staunch ally in the shipping fight, now began to hold him up to ridicule, especially when he defended compensation for publicans, as he always had done, and accepted the equality of denominational schools, as it was rational to do. Two cartoons in particular he and his family thought "brutal", and assuredly they were of a cruelty ordinarily reserved by *Punch* in those days for the Irish party. One showed him as a garish Cockney drinking with Mr.

¹ See that indignant and amusing work, *Memoirs of Edmund Burke*, by Charles McCormick (1797). Called on the title-page "An Impartial Review", its consequent tone is what might be expected. "From the first moment of Mr. Burke's apostasy, whenever he

took occasion to mention any eminent advocate for civil or religious liberty, he seemed to foam at the mouth, and in the transports of his rage and malice to pay no regard to truth, to candour, to conviction, to common decency or common sense", etc., etc.

Bung and exchanging winks over the glasses. Another showed him walking arm-in-arm with Beer and Bible—Bung on one side and the Bishop on the other, the bland divine congratulating him on his recantation. CHAP.
XLI.
ÆT. 52-55.

“Who can refute a sneer?” said Paley of Gibbon’s chapters on the rise of Christianity. It is a pertinent comment against Chamberlain at this period. But a corresponding question is in his favour, “Who can refute a caricature?” No one, happily for the gaiety of nations, though the truth may be the antithesis of the picture. A deliberate discussion of the charges of unworthy recantation is necessary to this biography and indeed to political history.

III

On the Irish Question it has been thoroughly shown in these pages that Chamberlain was more consistent—for what that is worth—than Gladstone. He had stood in advance for as much self-government as could be entrusted to a subordinate assembly. Repudiating separation of legislatures always—and everything tending to diminish the working supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, or to make it less representative of the whole United Kingdom—he had the most clear-cut conviction that Gladstonian logic in these matters would lead on to real disruption. How far real disruption has actually occurred, as he predicted, is to-day a matter of exhibition. The field of historic contention about whys and wherefores remains open. Whether further consequences will be more harmonious or as utterly misfortunate as he conceived, the future must show. Gladstone referred fondly to the examples of unity with autonomy presented then by Sweden and Norway, by Austria and Hungary. Both examples have vanished long since. On the contrary, the instances of Germany, Italy, the United States, Canada and so forth made Chamberlain a Unionist, though the American models made him ready also to be a federalist.

Chamberlain was a Unionist by nature. In private business, in municipal government, in party organisation, he had worked for expansion and consolidation. All other great states have adhered to the integrating ideal whether employing the centralis-

BOOK IX. ing or the federalising mechanism. Since no British or Irish party
 1888-91. whatever supported his idea of intermediate Home Rule on lines applicable to all four nations, but implying the firm federation of the United Kingdom for common affairs, he cannot be blamed for abandoning that plan. That he formed it at all is signally to his repute amongst the British statesmen of his day—the only born reorganiser amongst them all.

But when he determined that the Union must be upheld at all costs, his inconsistency on some other issues became compulsory and undeniable. He had been the most determined of disestablishers. To have to give up that cause altogether as touching the Church of England was inwardly a hard wrench. But the Liberal and Labour parties alike have followed him in abandoning totally the political struggle for English Disestablishment. Then, from their point of view, where is his offence? Is it that he accepted in advance over forty years ago the practical situation wherein they all acquiesce to-day? With courage in a predicament he adhered to Welsh Disestablishment, voting for it as late as 1894, when only one Liberal Unionist supported him; predicting on other occasions that it must come, as it did.

Can it seriously be argued that Chamberlain should rather have disestablished the Legislative Union and dished himself by insisting, in spite of the new and overruling conditions, on the whole of the old Nonconformist policy? That policy might not have been successful in any case, but Gladstone's course on Home Rule made it finally impossible.

As for becoming "the friend of the parson", he did learn to like the parson better as a man, and was no worse himself humanly for that mellowing of feeling on better acquaintance-ship. Maturing tolerance in religious matters is generally allowed to be a development, not a retrogression.

Voluntary schools and the denominational system he accepted, as we have seen, having waged a long struggle against them. But again—as in the case of disestablishment—the modern Liberal and Labour parties to-day are just in the position he reached. They no longer dream of disturbing the mixed system in primary education. Democracy in general is of the same mind so far as at all it remembers the issue. Chamberlain

anticipated what has since become everyone's conclusion. After twenty years of undisturbed custom, after a revolution in all the circumstances and relative values of politics, he saw that in fact Forster's work could not be undone, and that in the educational sphere the dualism of national tradition could not be altered and must stand? Nonconformist Home Rulers attacked him on this issue, and might well, considering the doctrines of militant dissent they had learned at his feet. But their own perseverance on the former lines proved to be the way to self-frustration both on education and temperance.

CHAP.
XLI.
ÆT. 52-55.

This last word brings another issue to the test. He had never belonged to the sour temperance party, but had advocated fair compensation to publicans as good economics and good morals. He stood apart, believing not only in the restriction of drinking facilities but in the abolition of the sale of liquor for private profit. That inducement to push the sale he held to be at the root of a gross public evil. His Gothenburg scheme of old days for making the liquor traffic a public monopoly like water and lighting was a strong, practical plan. He felt certain that he could have worked it beneficently in Birmingham. He received no more support for it than for his policy of federal Home Rule. He never saw the use of abusing publicans personally for being what our legal system made them. He believed absolutely in compensation to facilitate reform, and might have instanced as a precedent the abolition of slavery. The Radical Unionist thought that the extreme temperance party were obstructing sobriety and maintaining a bad system by their impracticable animus against individuals who derived their position partly from law and custom as these stood, partly from the average state of popular sentiment desiring to reduce drunkenness without penalising existing publicans or brewers.

This characteristic English attitude Chamberlain thoroughly understood, and he regretted that the Conservative Government had not pluck enough to insist on steady reduction of licences as the object and on compensation as the key. Liberals before Home Rule were no more favourable to his idea of municipalising the liquor trade than Conservatives after it. No one can say that Gladstone or Harcourt or Morley, Rosebery or Campbell-

BOOK Bannerman, Asquith or Lloyd George, were more earnest morally
IX. about temperance reform than our Radical Imperialist, or more
1888-91. capable in plan. Are the Liberal and Labour parties of to-day
either more earnest or more practical than the almost solitary
advocate fifty years ago of municipal purchase of the liquor
interest and the extinction of private profit from the sale of
intoxicants?

It is next asserted that the fierce assailant of the House of Lords in 1884 became its brass-browed apologist in the course of the following decade. Let us see. From the beginning of 1886 he became what he had not been before, a serious student of constitutions, especially those of the United States and Canada. He saw that under the British system, so far as the electorate and the House of Commons were concerned, even a proposition of the magnitude and novelty of Gladstone's Home Rule might be carried by a fluke. He recognised then the necessity of some bulwark against precipitate and irrevocable change by fugitive majorities not representing the settled understanding and will of the bulk of a people. The first Home Rule Bill had staggered him. If that proposal could be attempted by a sudden coup without any plain consultation of the electorate beforehand, then any revolution might be attempted in the same manner.

Hereditary privilege as the basis of any legislative assembly Chamberlain always thought ridiculous and unsafe. But from 1886 he believed thoroughly in an efficient Second Chamber to secure deliberate consideration by the people before any fundamental change in the principles of legislation, or in the structure of the State, could be carried. He would have preferred an elective Senate on the American model. Liberals bent on reducing the prerogative of the House of Lords maintained its hereditary composition to enfeeble the Second Chamber. Conservatives had not the foresight nor the grip to abolish the hereditary principle and reinforce the Upper House while that bold step was still feasible. Chamberlain decided, and declared accordingly, that he would uphold the House of Lords until some better Second Chamber could be put in its place. After 1886 the Peers on Home Rule were in accord with the steady popular majority of England, "the predominant partner", to recall Lord Rosebery's

phrase. Chamberlain's change of attitude towards the House of Lords was in proportion to an immense change in public circumstances.

CHAP.
XLI.
Æt. 52-55.

IV

Minor articles in the impeachment for apostasy are hardly worth discussion. Burke after 1789 compounded with many things he disliked to combat that thing he abhorred. When the Gladstonians said "One Man, One Vote", and the Radical Unionist answered in effect "Yes, and One Vote One Value", tactics were equally discernible on both sides. Both positions were taken up not for philosophical motives, but with a view to the electioneering game, and one was as good as the other. He had been in favour of more equal electoral districts no less than of a wider suffrage. The Gladstonians had their good case against the class privilege of plural voting. Chamberlain's case was that the over-representation of Nationalist Ireland, if continued, Home Rule being in question, must be balanced by the more efficient representation of Great Britain, where extreme anomalies existed as between small and large constituencies.

For the sake of Home Rule, Gladstone adopted all, and much more than all, the Radical propositions of social and electoral reform which in 1885 he had mistrusted and discountenanced. For the sake of the Union, Lord Salisbury for the Tories and Lord Hartington for the Whigs consented at Chamberlain's instance to unwelcome propositions. Similarly, to promote cohesive alliance on the Unionist side, the Radical associate, in return for the concessions he exacted, had to swallow a good deal of his former feeling, though under the conditions of party warfare he was bound to deny that he had broken his eggs to make his omelettes. His necessary inconsistencies—springing from will and decision, not from weakness or instability—are easier to defend than are some of his denials of his inconsistencies. The same thing might be said of all the other foremost characters of that period when their earlier and later utterances are compared.

The notable thing in the circumstances is that he struck so good a balance—adhering to so much of what he had advocated before the Liberal split and squeezing so much out of "Whigs and Tories". When County Councils—for London as well as the

BOOK shires—were established, Liberal promises shuffled off year after
IX. year were implemented by a Conservative Government. Free
1888-91. education followed. For Chamberlain, were not these events triumphs of tenacity won against heavy odds? If he was too sanguine about small holdings, so was every other statesman who advocated that purpose under conditions then prevailing.

What of the remaining point of the “unauthorised programme”, graduated taxation? When he advocated it, he looked chiefly, as we have noticed, not to the income-tax but to the house-duty and the death-duties. Large toll levied by the Exchequer on wealth transmitted to heirs was his idea of “ranscm”—a high price paid for all privileges not earned by personal achievement. Death-duties became a more massive instrument than any statesman in the nineteenth century anticipated. Under the first Unionist Government, Goschen’s finance made faintly for the increase of the death-duties; and we shall find that when Sir William Harcourt’s Budget a few years later applied stringent graduation to the taxation of wealth after death, Chamberlain stood fast in support of the principle.

His frank change of view on the Egyptian occupation was vindicated by the subsequent Liberal policy of Lord Rosebery and Sir Edward Grey.

The charge of recantation against Chamberlain only means that, like Burke in the anti-revolutionary phase, he subordinated everything else to the success of a master purpose. Few men forced by an unexpected issue to change their side in politics have realised so much of their former proposals; or have based new views more ably on new circumstances; or have had plainer reasons for defending a main cause and conducting a difficult alliance by give-and-take through a series of compromises showing consummate management without forfeit of character.

Sincerity not consistency is the real issue in all these historic cases. Hestands and falls on the major question—whether he truly believed in the Union and in the effectual supremacy of an Imperial Parliament representing Great Britain and Ireland alike. That he did believe this with his whole being and nature there is not a tittle of doubt. Chamberlain kept by him Macaulay’s well-known remark on reasonable changes of opinion: “A man

who had held the same opinions about the Revolution in 1789, in 1794, in 1804, in 1814 and in 1834, would have been either a divinely inspired prophet or an obstinate fool".

CHAP. XLI.
ÆT. 52-55.

The truth is that attacks on Chamberlain's changes were the ready weapons of hatred, not its cause. It is better explained by his infuriating skill both in retort and resort. With astute ingenuity in word and act, with control of his natural temper, he worsted his assailants when they felt surest of the advantage; and overcame them for many years. And this man had once been their own. No matter what he might do or say, they could not be expected to love him. His survival in these circumstances was infuriating; his increasing dominance intolerable.

V

The line of examination so far followed by no means explains fully the virulence of animosity against Chamberlain. All resolute fighting leaders in politics are vilified in proportion to their strength by the parties they attack or the groups they offend. At different phases, Bolingbroke and Walpole, Chatham and Pitt, Burke and Fox, Canning and Peel—not to speak particularly of a non-parliamentary statesman like Warren Hastings—had passed through the same ordeal. Beaconsfield was satanic to one set of partisans, and Gladstone a criminal egomaniac to the other. Yet it seems certain that the intensity and persistency of feeling against Chamberlain, first on the Conservative side, then on the Liberal, were more like the execration visited on a Strafford or a Castlereagh than like any late example. On the other hand, he had the compensation of delighting hosts of adherents through all his public life. In private society he was a favourite amongst all who knew him well. In his own town where he was best known he was best loved. How then are we to account for the fact that before the Home Rule crisis he was more assailed than any other Liberal, and afterwards far more than any other Unionist?

In the history of public abuse, Chamberlain's case is a unique curiosity. To call him merely a "traitor" was mild—a dew-drop by comparison with the curse pronounced by the Liberal ex-Whip, Lord Wolverton, who exclaimed in Dorset: "Judas

BOOK IX. 1888-91. Iscariot betrayed his Master and so has Mr. Chamberlain''. Labouchere, in a speech at Bury on October 27, 1891, put him much below Judas:

He had not come down there to defend Judas. Still, there was something to be said for Judas. After betraying his Master he did not attend public meetings; he did not revile his associates; he did not sponge upon the priests, the Pharisees and the Sadducees in order to be received into their society; he did not go swaggering about Judaea saying he had now joined the gentlemen of Jerusalem. No. Judas was contrite; he was ashamed; he went out and hanged himself. In some things Judas appears advantageously with Mr. Chamberlain.¹

Other passages in the rhodomontade ran:

This ex-Radical donning as he did the Tory livery, first putting on the coat and then pulling on the breeches, until he stood forward boldly and proudly in the character of a full-blown Tory flunkey.

Thousands of minor Gladstonians wrote and spoke in this key:

The ignoble ambition which possesses you can only be gratified at the expense of principle, of promises, of programmes and of party.—Thou liar of the first magnitude. English political history knows no such graceless Tartuffe.—If hypocrisy be the homage that vice pays to virtue, then indeed you are a courtier.²

Many Liberals who were ashamed of this frantic fudge spoke and wrote of him habitually as a man of low culture actuated by meanness, jealousy and spite. Not content to picture him as the landlords' friend and the brewers' advocate; as one who had deserted the cause of the people for the society of duchesses; they implied that his intellectual equipment was miserable. He had no reading, they said, beyond a limited acquaintance with Dickens. All this is as near to the truth as the diatribes of Junius against Barrington, or O'Connell's suggestion that Disraeli was a replica of the impenitent thief.

It is not enough to admit that Chamberlain was aggressive to

¹ *Bury Times*, October 28, 1891. "It was this consciousness of failure—of personal failure as he saw it, so closely had he identified himself with his hopes—that inspired the peculiar bitterness with which, in and out of season, he [Labouchere] attacked

the statesman whom he held responsible for the altered situation . . . nothing was too bad for 'Joe'."—Algar Thorold's *Labouchere*, p. 207.

² These are samples of Liberal literature in Birmingham during the election of 1892.



“ HIS INFLUENCE ACCUMULATES THOUGH
HIS PARTY DECAYS ”

Reproduced from Lucy's *A Diary of the Salisbury Parliament, 1886-1892*,
by kind permission of Messrs. Cassell & Co. Ltd.

extremity and vitriolic in phrase; or worse, that he usually prevailed over those he irritated. The abnormal personal hostility he partly drew on his head by his own faults. He was never fully conscious of them. He was blameable in his bitterness, in his habit of acid derision, in his travesties of general sentiments he had formerly shared. In combat he always hit as hard as he could; but—except when, frequently enough, he rose with intent to be merciless to his worst enemies—he did not always know how hard he hit; nor how strokes he did not intend to be cruel raised weals or broke the flesh. As in the case of other men of his type, retaliation made him, in his turn, the victim of his aggressiveness. Again, though wary and lynx-eyed in face of an opponent or an emergency, he was not cautious within himself. Rash slips of speech laid him open. No man was more unfairly treated in the Irish controversy. Nationalists notably deserved no clemency from him. For his own sake, not theirs, we may wish that he had refrained from the last insults. On the Radical side, Labouchere led a campaign of adept malignancy. Chamberlain's invective often had this in mind, without mentioning it. Not realising that his reprisals were intended for a section, Liberalism at large took to itself his phrases of scorn and contempt, carrying partisan acrimony to its utmost excess more frequently than any statesman of his period.

“Scathing”, “biting”, “wounding”, “wicked” are the words in which his effects are continually described by friend and foe. In these moods, especially when rising from the bench where Gladstone sat, Chamberlain, with jutting face and thrusting profile and managed eye-glass—his voice both agreeable and dangerous, cool yet temperamental in every accent, with corrosive words aggravated by calculated tones and imperturbable demeanour—seemed from head to foot, to his opponents, the very figure of provocation.

His mistake was to impute too often to the “new Radicals” the tricks and baseness of demagogy, as well as folly and impotence. They had lost all sense of sane, constructive policy, he inferred, and their perversion was equalled by their fatuity; they were the “nihilists” and “anarchists” of our politics; they followed their venerated leader blindfold; they winked at outrage; and they thought no price too high to pay for Irish votes. All

BOOK
IX.
1888-91.

this was suggested with the air and the tones of incomparable mockery in a manner never forgotten or forgiven.

Worst of all, this vein was not balanced by those happy lapses into generosity which may soften from time to time the habitual asperities of party. No wonder that the mass of his opponents thought that there must be some evil in one who imputed so much of it, and that the real man and his public style were the same. But political speech to him at this period was a mode of war with missiles and projectiles; and he never had any other thought in his head, when preparing a controversial speech, than to attack, demolish and occupy. He was just as different in private life as is a soldier at home from the soldier in action. Not that even in private he was too favourable to the motives of his opponents. He damned them heartily with colloquial expletives. But yet in his conversation there was a recurrent quality seldom allowed to appear in his speeches—a vein of tolerant though caustic humour regarding persons, and a detached judgment of situations.

There was another interesting defect of Chamberlain's qualities. With much pity for others on due occasion, he had no self-pity; he could not touch the chords of pathos or elegy, or express at all the sense of tears in mortal things. Instance the well-known occasion when his parliamentary tribute to the memory of John Bright was much below the subject. It was perhaps his most complete failure in feeling and phrasing. He fell into bathos at the end when, without proportion, he described truly how dogs and cats in a strange house always came to the orator. "I think that those domestic animals are good judges of character . . . theirs was the only popularity which Mr. Bright ever courted."¹ He could no more do justice to such themes than he could have made Bright's speech on the Angel of Death. The witty lines of English verse he quotes freely; the majestic lines of its poetry never. In practical imagination—that is, in the architectural sense applied to politics—he excelled. But, to interpret spiritual imagination he had no faculty. Devoid of the melting gift, he lacked the power of soothing by incidental magnanimities the animosity he roused. Yet all the while he had a deep fund of human feeling that he could not utter.

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. cccxxxiv. (March 29, 1889).

VI

In politics a single phrase, whereon an enemy can seize, will be remembered when everything merely excellent is ignored. Many of Chamberlain's speeches at this time were entirely free from offensiveness, compact of acute reason. Though the Irish controversy was conducted in a foul temper on both sides, he could on occasion speak as at Oxford, in May 1890, when his "plea for a non-party settlement of the Irish Land Question" was a pattern of moderate yet cogent argument. But when he showed this side of himself, it was little appreciated or noticed. What audiences and newspapers had learned to expect from him was the pepper in the dish. Thus, and in various other ways, for his accustomed style of invective he paid his penalty, and it was heavier than he deserved.

CHAP.
XLI.
Æt. 52-55.

A different kind of error was as damaging. We have already noticed how, when he spoke as the associate of "English gentlemen", the conventional phrase coming from him delivered him to foes. His most serious slip in this way happened when at the end of July 1889 he intervened in the debate on Royal grants. Gladstone and Morley were at variance. The chance was inviting. The Radical Unionist's defence of the Queen, of constitutional monarchy with its necessary appanages and expenses, was for the most part admirable; sound in its matter, and in entire accordance with views he had asserted long ago when he thought Republicanism theoretically the best form of government. But too much for him on this occasion was the temptation to rap "the junior member for Northampton", Labouchere, and "the right honourable member for Newcastle", Morley. Chamberlain was lured into satire on the theme of "the People with a capital P". It was pungent, but not prudent coming from a man of his record:

"I say the sum taken by the Queen is reasonable and even moderate. (Cheers.) We are told that the people—the People with a capital P—(laughter)—think it exorbitant. We are told this by hon. members who profess on all occasions to speak for the People with a capital P. . . . These hon. members tell us it is a shameful thing to fawn upon a monarch. So it is; but it is a much more shameful thing to truckle to a multi-

BOOK IX. tude. ('Oh, oh', 'Hear, hear', and ironical cheers and counter-
 1888-91. cheers.)"

And he finished by denouncing "the programme of those who call themselves new Radicals—new because they have nothing in common with the old Radicals—(laughter)—who are destructive in their aims and objects, who have never shown the slightest constructive capacity—('Hear, hear' and ironical cheers)—who are, in short, nothing more nor less than the nihilists of English politics. (Laughter, Ministerial cheers and counter ironical cheers.)"¹ This fling did not strengthen his argument, but coming from him, injured himself. He never, indeed, repeated that strain, but Harcourt, for once, had him on the hip for it in terms no more unfair than his own: "The right honourable member . . . talks of the cant of the new Radicalism. I will borrow a well-known saying of Lord John Russell, that there was something more sickening than the cant of new Radicalism and that was the recant of old Radicalism."² No single utterance contributed more than this capital P to estrange totally from him a young and rising school, which at a time far distant was to become more powerful than he guessed and to have its day and its revenge.

This distasteful enquiry a faithful biographer was bound to pursue. But that the marching succession of Chamberlain's speeches at this period owed their conquering effect to their sustained power and not to their acrid incidentals will appear somewhat further on.

VII

The most painful recrimination of this period destroyed for a long time—for ever it seemed then—what was left of his friendship with John Morley. While the friendship with Dilke was one of absolute staunchness, it was of a somewhat responsible and weighty kind; Morley had been a delightful human companion, full of literary stimulus and illustration, of grateful attachment. Chamberlain, we remember, by all the ironies, had helped the completion of the *Life of Cobden*. On its instant success the temporary obligation was discharged. In politics the Radical leader, no less, helped to make Morley a chief orator of the Caucus

¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. xxxviii. (July 29, 1889).

² *Ibid.*

when Chamberlain as a Minister could not occupy that high pulpit as of old. They had been like brothers. Now for six years nothing had been inwardly right between them, and it is hard to say which was the more in fault. We know how the Radical Unionist began it by the unhappy letter to Labouchere, when in May 1886 he found Morley resisting concessions that might have kept Chamberlain in the Liberal party; and how Morley called him "the envious Casca". We have seen through what phases of momentary reconciliation and bitter revulsion they passed in the Round Table period and just after.

CHAP.
XLI.
ÆT. 52-55.

In spite of it all, between them relations at one time promised to recover. When Morley was very ill, Chamberlain telegraphed and wrote to him from Washington with solicitous sympathy. The invalid answered, "Your kind and friendly word was very soothing to me and I shall always thank you for it. . . . The shine has gone out of the daylight very grievously within the last two years."

Shortly afterwards the mischief became deeper. Chamberlain desired that he, Morley and Harcourt, after the manner of some classical and mediæval heroes, should avoid each other in the battle and turn their spears against others. It was possible for him, but not at all for them. He was the conspicuous antagonist on his side, and unless they encountered him personally they could take no effective part. In presenting to Highbury two famous autographs, Carlyle's and Tennyson's, Morley markedly praises the line from the later *Locksley Hall*:

Love your enemy, bless your haters, said the Greatest of the great.

Chamberlain agreed that it was an excellent line; wished everybody who liked it to practise it; but, instead, a certain very dear acquaintance, judging by public insinuations lately, did not always seem even to love his friend. At this they fell into restrained discussion about misunderstandings in "those disastrous days of 1886", as Morley called them, and explanations did some good.

Presently they broke into bitter quarrel. Morley at Ipswich was not content with describing "the lost leader" as the typical renegade of Browning's verses. He was led to add his taunt at an unlucky moment when Chamberlain was going to America

BOOK IX.
1888-91. to be married: "Who knows but that I may be made a Fishery Commissioner and may be even admitted to the society of gentlemen!" When the Radical Unionist came home he replied with a heavy stroke of reproach, touched with contempt, in one of the most impassioned of all his Imperialist appeals, closing amidst excited enthusiasm:

I confess it seems to me that the gulf between us is greater and deeper than the Irish Question, and that at the bottom there lies a radical distinction in our several conceptions of the duty of a great State and a great Government. There is a school of modern philosophy, of which the literary representative is Mr. John Morley, which shrinks from national obligations and which, like Pilate, would wash its hands of national responsibility. The timorous spirit which they have shown in this proposal to abandon Ireland to anarchy, finds its counterpart in the feeling which sees only wanton and unwise aggression in the constant growth and expansion of our Empire. In the history of its past, of its growth and development, Mr. Morley sees nothing to be proud of: he sees only what he calls, with a flourish of tawdry rhetoric, an Empire of swagger. . . .¹

More letters and another delusive reconciliation. Morley protested that he had meant no harm, and next made a more disarming confession:

January 26, 1889.—J. M. to J. C.—In regard to the speech at Ipswich I frankly admit that in the heat of the moment some expressions escaped from me at which you might have taken not unjust offence. . . . You are really *stupendously* misjudging me in suspecting me, as your last word or two imply, of motives extra-political. Every motive and sentiment and impulse, outside the desire to make a good fight on a public question, drew me and draw me strongly the other way. . . .

January 27, 1889.—J. C. to J. M.—I accept your assurances with the greatest pleasure and will think no more of what gave me pain before. I hope it may be possible in the future to avoid all occasions for either giving or taking offence.

Alas, nothing was less possible. The difficulty was kept within bounds for some time. Chamberlain observed the pious pact too faithfully, for he committed a marked offence of silence—when

¹ Address to his constituents, Birmingham Town Hall, January 23, 1889.

he invaded the constituency of Newcastle he did not even mention its distinguished member.

CHAP.
XLI.
Æt. 52-55.

VIII

Morley, in the House of Commons a few months later, made a speech composed to be very damaging, as for the moment it was. He directly attacked the Radical Unionist and accused him of deserting even free education. We know how far from truth was this. Chamberlain in private was still pressing for free education and determined to have it. He could not fully explain. The debate was heated. Resisting a Liberal amendment, Chamberlain declared that he would give no vote that would injure the Government while not advancing free education. He sat down amidst opprobrious outcries from the Opposition benches, where speaker after speaker leaped up to bait him. Morley had made the mistake this time. The Radical Unionist flamed:

CHAMBERLAIN AND MORLEY

February 22, 1890.—J. C. to J. M.—You will see that the charge is absolutely unfounded and that the pledge I really gave was that I would not join a Government which excluded Free Education and the other proposals which I had advocated from consideration. I claimed that they should not be negatived in anticipation, but I did not demand that they should be immediately adopted. . . . Last night throughout my speech I scrupulously avoided a word of personal accusation against former colleagues. . . . Notwithstanding this reserve on my part, you and Harcourt think it consistent with your position as leaders of a party and with your private relations to myself to ignore my argument and to meet it by a bitter and almost venomous personal attack founded on a recollection which the facts show to be extremely defective.

I make some allowance for the heat of discussion, but I ask you now in cool blood to review the circumstances and to let me know whether in future I am to regard you as a personal friend separated from me by political differences or as a political opponent animated by an intense personal animosity.

February 24, 1890.—J. M. to J. C.— . . . I am heartily sorry for the scene of Friday night. I think it likely enough that I was led by the

BOOK IX.
1888-91. heat of the moment into a vehemence of demeanour which gave you just offence. I much regret it. We were all three, however—you and Harcourt as well as myself—in a state of considerable excitement for good reasons or for bad; such excitement is contagious and this must be my excuse.

It takes no consideration to answer your question as to the future. Excepting on one or two occasions of what I felt to be excessive provocation from you—I have never varied in my strong desire to save all that I possibly could from this apparent wreck of the greatest and closest friendship of my life. I am in the same mind now—I want to save all that I can—and I am always as vexed as I was on Saturday and Sunday when one of these vile *rencontres* happens. "Personal animosity" is not in my line—and least of all to you. That is the simple truth.

They shook hands in the House of Commons. They agreed to make another attempt to avoid each other in the fray. Their friendly relations were resumed. For the rest of that year and most of the next they dined together pretty often:

CHAMBERLAIN'S DIARY

Monday, February 24, 1890.—Saw Morley at House of Commons. . . . I asked him what was to be our future relationship—we had had experience of free criticism and had found it to be incompatible with friendship. . . . Willing to make a new start and agree to a reciprocal reserve which would strictly exclude personal attack and recrimination. If it failed there would be nothing left but to acknowledge the end of friendly relations, but he hoped this might be avoided and would honestly strive to carry out the suggested arrangement. . . .

Friday, November 28, 1890.—J. Morley dined with me. He is very depressed at the position of affairs. . . .

February 24, 1891.—J. Morley dined with me. He was in much better spirits than when he was last here. He expressed himself confident of a victory at General Election and said the party in House and country was never more unanimous. He considered that they would have great difficulties after they came into office. Mr. Gladstone could not do work late at night and showed signs of age. Some of the rank and file were captious. Harcourt had his characteristic qualities—still sufficient unto the day, etc., and his view was that (quoting an expression which he

attributed to me at our last meeting) after the General Election "we might have to review the conditions, and meanwhile we must keep cool." CHAP.
XLI.
Æt. 52-55.

Sunday, March 15, 1891.—John Morley dined. Complained of Harcourt, whose policy was always dictated by the exigencies of the hour without regard to the future. He said he would like to resist the pranks of Labouchere and the men below the gangway, but Mr. G. did not care for anything but the Irish question, and Harcourt was ready to swallow anything. He [Morley] looked forward with the greatest apprehension to the time when they might be in a majority and did not see how they could possibly carry on a Government.

So they mended their wooden bridge for nearly two years. Then it collapsed and left the river between them. In the autumn of 1891 Chamberlain spoke at Sunderland, and in one of his ruthless moods he went too far, holding up to odium and mockery the Cabinet of 1880-85—in which he remained throughout. No doubt he chafed under the conditions. No doubt he bit the chain at the time. No doubt he now regretted his share in the collective record. But as in fact he had not resigned, though often threatening it and meaning it, he shared the fullest constitutional responsibility with the rest, and his tone cannot be defended. He ought to have spoken, if at all on this line, with quietness and compunction. This speech generally was at Gladstone's expense, but there was no syllable of personal insult to him and nothing directly offensive to Morley though much indirectly wounding. The latter tore up the pact of friendship and used the nearest platform. It was at Manchester. There with extreme hostility he proclaimed that the Radical Unionist, ignoring his own share of responsibility, had held up his former colleagues

to obloquy and contempt in order to serve a paltry purpose of the moment. This was a hitting below the belt for which he ventured to say a parallel could not be found in the worst times of our political history.¹

That extravagance in personalities much exceeded Chamberlain's error. Is an ex-member of a Cabinet never to confess its past blunders nor hold them up to the country as an example to avoid? The Radical Unionist's fault was in the tone of attack,

¹ John Morley at the Manchester Reform Club, October 26, 1891.

not in his reflections upon the discordant Cabinet to which he had belonged. The two men wrangled in *The Times*. Then more private letters passed, but they were the last exchange for years.

THE BREAK BETWEEN CHAMBERLAIN AND MORLEY

October 27, 1891.—*Chamberlain*.—I carefully avoided any imputation of motive and any attack on personal character. In your reply at Manchester last night you deliberately set yourself to prove that my motives are dishonest and my proceedings dishonourable. I consider that the line you have chosen is unjust and altogether unworthy of the man who wrote five years ago, "It is always a delight to me to think that *dignitas mea*, whatever it may amount to, has been *inchoata, aucta, et longius provecta* not by three men but by one—and that one yourself."

October 29, 1891.—*Morley*.—I have used no language imputing dishonesty, nor have I ever allowed that odious thought to lodge in my mind since our differences began. . . . I have never forgotten the obligations to which you refer. In spite of what happened in 1886 I could and would have repaid them. When you talked to me a year ago of "revision of conditions" I fancied openings would gradually occur. But you have made my hopes more and more impossible. These embittered attacks on Mr. Gladstone so incessantly reiterated—how can you expect me to take no notice? If in defending him I attack you who are his assailant, how can I help that?

I hate and detest contentions between you and me.¹ Some of our friends enjoy a *mêlée*. I don't. I often think that I should leave Parliament but for Mr. G. So long as I am there I should despise myself—and so would you despise me—if I did not stand firm by him.

October 30, 1891.—*Chamberlain*.—Your letter justifies and therefore aggravates the offence of your original attack. You *did* charge me with dishonesty unless words have lost their meaning. Why else did you pile up extracts, separated from their context and deliberately brought together to prove a shameless inconsistency? What is the description which applies to one who "for paltry purposes hits below the belt", and by what adjective otherwise than "dishonest" would you stigmatise "conduct unparalleled in the worst times of our political history"? What

¹ Alas, three years later, Morley was to write to Harcourt that Mr. Gladstone's conduct in blessing Chamberlain on the licensing question was "almost as bad as Chamberlain's re-

proaches about the mess made by a Government of which he was a member" (September 27, 1894). Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. ii. p. 307.

is the excuse for this virulence of language in speaking of one to whom you admit some obligation, and who has never made a similar attack upon you throughout this controversy in spite of gross and reiterated provocation?

CHAP.
XLI.
Æt. 52-55.

Your assertion that I am animated by personal dislike of Mr. Gladstone is totally unfounded. . . . I have never said anything of him half as bitter as has been said quite as freely by Lord Hartington, Bright, and I may add by yourself before 1886. . . . I do not wish to prolong this correspondence. You promised not to attack me personally, my motives or my character. You have failed to keep the agreement into which you voluntarily entered. At least in the future I shall not be under limitations which I feel bound strictly to observe but which you think yourself at liberty to disregard whenever you consider that Mr. Gladstone's sacred personality is being treated with insufficient reverence.

As real friends they met no more until Home Rule was submerged under the waves of other controversies in the closing century. To Morley these things were miserable, but not tragic. In private they ravaged Chamberlain, though in public he seemed cased in mail. He now cried out to Collings:

I am sick—really sick of it all. I feel disgust—not anger—at the attacks which are made upon my character and motives, and I see no end to it, and no particular object in voluntarily submitting myself to it. I wish I could get out of the whole business, but I suppose it is impossible.¹

This bad business was well over. Open breach was better than false compromise. Secret irritation had persisted in each of their minds through all the years since the Hawarden kite. The artificial repression was unwholesome. They had less power to hurt each other when blows became a matter of course. They were both conscious of resemblance to historic personages. If after so many years of directing habit in business, civics and politics, Chamberlain was more imperious than Pitt, John Morley was often told that he looked like the supposed Julius Caesar in the British Museum. In profile he partly did, but nowise in full face. What he could least bear was the continual suggestion from Birmingham that he was a shining author and

¹ November 3, 1891. This was written just after the break with Morley and after Labouchere's simultaneous speech about the Tory flunkey, worse than Judas.

BOOK IX. philosopher who had impoverished literature by mistaking himself for a man of action.

1888-91.

With Harcourt, too, it came to scuffles and thwackings, but usually these engagements were lusty pantomime by comparison with the fell encounters. When sometimes, as was proper, Dugald Dalgetty's blade drew blood according to art, the wound soon healed. There was no poison on that sword. How could you be angry with a man who called you "The Bazaine of Birmingham"? The Radical Unionist's retort on the political "chameleon" was shrewd burlesque without malice.¹ These two thoroughly liked one another in an uncovenanted manner less difficult than sworn friendship and so often more lasting. In correspondence they exchanged sentiments the most amicable. Harcourt often wondered whether he would not have done better to resign with Chamberlain in 1886. Unlike Morley, he did not worship Gladstone, and in his heart he thoroughly understood Chamberlain's absolute determination in strategy and tactics—despite charges of inconsistency and recantation—to subordinate all else for the sake either of victory on the main issue or of uttermost resistance, whether victorious or not.

¹ Bacup, May 28, 1889.

CHAPTER XLII

LIFE AT HIGHBURY: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

(1889-1892)

THE Other Aspect—Chamberlain *Intime*—"Amongst his own People"—Life at Highbury—Gardens and Orchids—Financial Misfortune—The Crash in Argentina—Plans to Retrieve—A Great Adventure—The Island in the Bahamas—More Losses—The Stoic in Adversity—"It will Last my Time"—Divines at Highbury—Recreations in London—Kew and the Exchequer—A Cambridge Degree—He writes a Play and his Memoirs.

I

As a brief interlude in this account of an engrossed political career we must mark some lights and shades in his existence as a human being apart from public contest. No man whatever in his era was more widely different from common impression.

CHAP.
XLII.
ÆT. 53-56.

His family life and inward emotions were shut off with an almost exaggerated reticence from the curiosity of newspapers. The use of political publicity no statesman better understood or was more careful to secure. On the other hand, he never courted, but often rebuffed attempts to make gossip and description out of the intimate concerns of Highbury. There he was as exclusive as any Whig. His Englishman's house was his castle with a double moat. Partly this was inbred habit, and partly a manner of escape and rest by comparison with the almost incessant public show.

Some circumstances proper to a fuller understanding of his inward thoughts and trials were unknown in his time except to some of his family and one or two others. A closer view of his individual ways and vicissitudes of fortune is indispensable to any real appreciation of the man as he was within himself. Now

BOOK IX.
1889-92. that he was more than ever prominent and redoubtable as a national figure, his private life in Birmingham itself was more reserved and his intimates fewer.

There, too, the old circle was destroyed as in London, though with more compensations. The Tobacco Parliament was dissolved. The Liberal Club expired. Some of its animating members were dead; others politically estranged. Others again, hating the Conservative alliance, yet not willing to embrace Gladstonianism, had lost all zest in public life and gradually withdrew from it. Lamenting the bitterness of the quarrel, both the vituperation visited on the head of the Radical Unionist and the latter's retorts in kind, Dr. Dale remarked mournfully: "Joseph Chamberlain is still immensely interesting; but I am not sure that he is as interesting as he was twenty years ago. The split of the Liberal party has made an immense difference to my private life. . . . There are two clubs and I belong to neither."

II

Still to his own city the man of Birmingham could always turn for refreshment. He had his new domestic happiness, his children and his gardens. His kinspeople were a staunch clan. Many old friends remained devoted. The rising generation brought him fervent adherents. Tory democracy, joined to that three-fifths of local Liberalism he had carried with him by an achievement without parallel of its kind, gave him the assurance of larger majorities than ever before in his own sphere of influence. Birmingham felt that the effect of his separate and at first desperate fight, based on his local leadership, had made the town count in national politics for as much as twenty other of the large towns.

In this way, after John Bright's death in 1889, he became Birmingham's hero without a rival and unshakable on his own ground while he lived. After 1888, in spite of Gladstone's visit and wonderful effort at Bingley Hall, Schnadhorst's hopes and exertions were crushed for good. The National Liberal Federation never again had the shadow of a chance in Birmingham. Chamberlain could still greet numbers of workmen by name in the street. He was more careful of them than of the duchesses



THE LIBRARY AT HILSBURY

From a photograph taken in 1888

and dukes. Honours and rewards he could secure for chosen supporters, though it was an influence he used sparingly. Few things gave him more delight than when he caused Jesse Collings to be made a Privy Councillor, and beheld the beaming pleasure of that simple, sterling heart.

CHAP.
XLII.
Æt. 53-56.

At this very time Canon Smith of St. Paul's came to Birmingham and made good acquaintance. This clergyman of the Church of England, having none of the old Nonconformist associations, brought fresh eyes to a changed scene; and, perhaps for this reason, better than anyone he explains how the Chamberlain legend grew.

The very reverse of effusive he was indeed warm-hearted, and the folk hereabout divined it and responded. Their faith in him and their loyalty were of a kind which even the best of the public men of these days do not seem able to arouse in quite the same degree. He was our man. Some of us, perhaps, scarcely knew why we looked on him as we did. But we never cared to analyse the thing. There he was, and there was an end to it. What more was there to be said? While he did not suffer unwise or meddlesome persons gladly, he had a very kind heart and was always to be touched by a tale of genuine distress.¹

And Birmingham was proud that "our Joe" was becoming every day a bigger man against the hosts of his enemies, and attracting more and more attention as a figure in Imperial policy and as a force in world affairs.

A detached and accomplished foreign observer, M. Augustin Filon, described him in *Profils Anglais* with excellent acuteness and foresight for French readers; and divining the coming strength of the new democratic Imperialism, brought out clearly the strong human suggestion of the fact that the English leader, called "our Joe" in his locality, was bound to prove a formidable personage in the world's business. In a private letter to Highbury M. Filon remarked:

My study may perhaps supply you with some faint idea, some foretaste, of what men will say of you in distant periods and countries when we have all ceased to think and toil, when our great social battles have long been won or lost.²

¹ Note by Canon W. H. Smith in the Chamberlain Papers.

² Augustin Filon to Chamberlain, February 28, 1890.

III

BOOK IX.
1889-92. Into his one saving recreation he carried all his executive zest. No man was ever less abstract in his mental interests. A quick, discursive reader he remained, even when French novels had to replace his old general reading. But the living growth of his plants became a more absorbing interest than books of any kind. Like Wallenstein on campaign, remembering every detail of the farm, almost counting the chickens from a distance, Chamberlain at every moment of leisure forgot all the spite and the fume of politics, loving his grounds and flowers the more, as he cared less and less for all persons except a few. His gusto never flags. "All the rushes are come." "I should like some more rushes for my lower pool."—"I hope that the new planting is all right; I have thought of another improvement." "We carried off some good prizes at the Chrysanthemum Show. I hope the flowers are doing well, roses and orchids especially."

December 31, 1890.—*To his son Austen.*¹—We are having the longest frost that has been known for many years. The glass is said to have been down once to 3 degrees below zero. There is a great deal of snow and the ice on the pool is very bad in spite of constant floodings. The cold does not so much matter, but there is also a good deal of fog and no sun. Burbury begins to complain that his orchids are not looking so well and says piteously that he has only had about 24 hours sun in the last three months. In spite of everything he has a very good show in the flowering house, chiefly *Laelia Aneceps* and *Autumnalis*.

During the session, crowded though his days always are, he resorts when he can to the Botanical Gardens in Regent's Park. Above all he loves to visit Kew, where he rightly thinks that Pope's phrase about that "vegetable paradise" may be stiff in the adjective but is heavenly in the substantive. Later, when Harcourt is Chancellor of the Exchequer, he pleads confidentially and with success that in spite of general orders for economy, the Treasury may find the money for completing the Temperate House at Kew.

That House had remained uncompleted for thirty years. Then, one day during the session of 1893, Harcourt when Chan-

¹ Then in the Bahamas.

cellor of the Exchequer invited Chamberlain to pair with him for the evening.

J. C. "I am afraid I cannot do that as I am going to speak in this debate."

CHAP.
XLII.
ÆT. 53-56.

W. V. H. "Oh, don't do that, for if you speak I shall have to stay to reply. But I have an old engagement to preside this evening at the annual banquet of the Civil Service."

J. C. "Well, I will make a bargain with you. If you will put the money into next year's Estimates to complete the Temperate House at Kew, I will pair with you for as long as you like."

W. V. H. "That's a bargain."

And so it was done.¹

At Highbury he extends the glass-houses, varies the beds out of doors, adds to the shrubberies, and adorns the pool. "Joseph in Egypt" is full of enquiries about the little dairy farm which, however, after suggestions of his own, he leaves Austen to construct and manage. Above all, he likes to pace up and down the long bright corridor where his exotics are displayed. He is always enriching his collection of orchids. They never cease to fascinate. He studies their hues and forms, their gestures, traits and behaviour as though they were persons. He makes gay and even wild experiments in crossing. Of gardening, as the best of pleasures for never-failing expectation and surprise, his praises are constant.

IV

For him it was a costly pursuit, and led him into more expense than he could afford in the long run. No view of Chamberlain's life at this phase can be adequate without some understanding of his financial reverses. Like other things in his biography it is a chequered record of adversity and adventure, though a story screened from the world while he lived. Had he continued in manufacture he must have become, as we have seen, a millionaire. He was very far from that even when his investments as a whole were at their highest value. After his retirement from business he changed his whole habit. Sometimes the old faculty would reassert itself as in his commercial days, when he went into every farthing of his private accounts; but this was not often.

¹ Sir Austen Chamberlain's note.

BOOK
IX.
1889-92.

He never again gave the concentrated, unceasing thought to money that its best management demands. With the repute of a wealthy man—"Croesus in a fur coat", as Tory caricature depicted—he never was near so much opulence. Appeals for subscriptions and donations had long been far more than a real millionaire could satisfy. But up to the 'nineties he had enough. His investments were prosperous. It seems pretty certain that no statesman of his time gave so large a proportion of his income to public and charitable purposes as was given by this supposed recanter. Besieged by endless requests for subscriptions, he responded beyond his means. Humanly concerned, for instance, about unemployment, he founded the West Birmingham Relief Fund and continued to be its main supporter. We have seen how in relieving some hard cases in Birmingham he employed the benevolent Jesse as a medium and did not allow his own name to appear. And it need not be denied that the Harben in him was a little prodigal. He liked spending, improving, creating; and he had no taste for hoarding.

There came a serious change. A large holder of South American securities, in 1890 and later he suffered disastrously from the violent and continued shocks to credit and values in the Argentine. After that he was compelled to refuse many requests, such as formerly he would have been glad to satisfy; and he was under the disagreeable necessity of explaining to a few of his more intimate acquaintances that it was no longer possible for him to give as he used. The explanation could not be general, and some in Birmingham never understood.

Desiring to retrieve his losses, he was led into a sanguine enterprise. It improved the knowledge of the coming Colonial Secretary more than it favoured his revenue as a private individual. Visiting, with Mrs. Chamberlain, her parents and relatives in the autumn of 1890, he became restless under inaction and went off for an expedition on his own account. Sailing up the Hudson—"a magnificent river as fine as the Rhine or Danube"—he travels north, rejoicing all the way in the autumn beauty of America, and arrives at Montreal. There he makes a most persuasive acquaintance, Sir Ambrose Shea, Governor of the Bahamas.

Sir Ambrose is full of a new idea, and confident that it will

reward intrepidity by opulence. The Bahamas abounded in the sisal plant. It grew like a weed. You might assume, unthinkingly, that it flourished with a curse of abundance. But the Governor extolled the wonder of the weed. It gave a hemp equal to the best Manila. If cultivated boldly, it would develop the islands, and provide English capital with dazzling returns. There were enormous possibilities in it, said the convinced advocate:

CHAP.
XLII.
Æt. 53-56.

TO COLLINGS

Salem, Mass., October 28, 1890.— . . . On this trip an incident occurred which may have great importance in the fortunes of the Chamberlain family. At Montreal I saw Sir Ambrose Shea, Governor of the Bahamas, an intelligent man, full of a new discovery which is to revolutionise the condition of the islands. It consists of a plant growing like a weed, which was the curse of the islands till Shea found that it would give a hemp equal to the best Manilla. Now the cultivation is beginning on a large scale, and English capital is being brought in. From his account it looks as if enormous fortunes might be made out of this discovery and the prospect is so tempting that after thinking it over I wrote to Shea asking him for an option on 20,000 acres of land. . . . I shall not touch the matter unless there is really a large fortune in it. . . .

Coming just at this moment of his financial reverses and when he was free from the usual distractions of home politics, this prospect wakened in Chamberlain's nature the slumbering instinct of private adventure. Though he seldom indulged it, had he not been usually lucky when he did? He decided that this occasion of "great importance in the fortunes of the Chamberlain family" must be seized. He bought the 20,000 acres in one of the larger islands, Inagua, and sent his sons out to the scene. His next step was characteristic in its mixture of Nonconformist rigour and Elizabethan spirit. In his own teens he had been bundled suddenly into a business of which he possessed at the moment not an iota of knowledge. So now he packed off his son Neville, then aged twenty-two, to undertake in an island on the other side of the Atlantic an almost Crusoe-like attempt. In a wilderness he was to create ordered plantations and construct a factory to turn sisal into hemp. Had young Neville been of a nervous disposition, when he saw the conditions on the spot,

BOOK

IX.

1889-92.

every separate hair on his head might well have stood on end. It was an impossible commission. At this day there are no millions from sisal in the Bahamas. Then, there were not even hundreds in it. Insufficiency of labour and communications involved all manner of expensive difficulties concerning the construction of buildings and the installation of machinery. Not anywhere in the islands, and notably not in Inagua, were golden dreams to be realised.

Chamberlain lost £50,000 in the Bahamas, in addition to his former heavy losses as a result of the Argentine collapse and of depreciation all over the world. Taking it like a stoic, he never uttered a word of reproach to anyone. It was his own doing. He knew he had saddled his second boy with a hopeless task. A great sportsman in life's affairs and at need an impassive loser, he knew that it was all his own fault and that in an imaginative humour he had misjudged the enterprise. After he abandoned business for politics he never gave thought enough to money. His mind was elsewhere. Relatively to his already much reduced fortune, the loss of another £50,000 in the early 'nineties was calamitous. His finances never recovered though he had so vividly dreamed of advancing them, when he listened in Montreal to the mellifluous expositions of Sir Ambrose Shea.

Nor was this the end of disappointment. He had to begin the melancholy course of selling out. On very high advice such as anyone would have trusted, he sold out Canadian Pacifics at 68. Of all his investments, they were the very holdings which would have done much to retrieve his affairs, had he hung on.

After that, he lived deliberately on capital. He would keep up his position and show no public sign. His level word was, "It will last my time". Highbury itself, though in the best situation for political purposes in Birmingham, was too near the spreading town to be a good property. The approach of tall chimneys blighted its value. So his private interests and those of his family were relentlessly sacrificed to his public work. He died a poor man by comparison with what he was when he retired from money-making forty years before and devoted himself utterly to public service.

V

In London there could not be much change. Entertainment there was essential and for many years increased. At Highbury the rule of life became quieter and large companies the exception. Yet in small relations and great, Chamberlain rightly either abstained altogether from a thing or did it well. A typical scene is described by a good hand. Dr. Crosskey, the Unitarian leader in Birmingham, was a broad humanist as well as scientist and divine. Grieving enough over the Liberal disruption, he yet looked on the difficulties of the time less drearily and wearily than Dale and was more decided on the Unionist side. His letter, at the beginning of November 1892, gives an honest picture:

CHAP.
XLII.
Æt. 53-56.

November 4, 1892.— . . . Last week I confess to a rather adventurous expedition in the shape of a dinner at Chamberlain's—where luxuries were not exactly the products of INVALID COOKING. But it was to *meet a bishop* and therefore of course a temptation to such a hybrid ecclesiastic as I am. But the occasion was a remarkable instance of the thorough way Chamberlain does things.

You know the Bishop of Chester has been propounding a scheme about the Drink traffic in which Chamberlain is greatly interested,¹ and he therefore invites him to dinner—and asks to meet him one of the chief brewers in Birmingham, one of the strongest Teetotallers, another Bishop (Coventry) and some leading clergy, Dale and myself as Nonconformists, and some few others, Tories and Gladstonians.

After dinner, he (as it were) took the Chair—and opened a discussion on the subject, in which teetotallers, publicans and sinners, and dignitaries of the church—and *dissenters*—took part in a perfectly frank and good-tempered way—while Chamberlain kept on the watch for something that might be practicable in the strife of parties.²

This sketch from the life is valuable as showing how far other was Chamberlain in private from his public aggressiveness. In parliamentary debate and on the platform he too often gave colour to the accusation of his enemies that he used explosive

¹ Chamberlain still advocated the Gothenburg system—municipalisation of the liquor traffic and abolition of private profit from the sale of drink. The Bishop of Chester was trying—in

vain—to revive something like this policy.

² R. A. Armstrong, *Henry William Crosskey, His Life and Work*, p. 417.

BOOK
IX.
1889-92.

bullets by preference and design. As host and in committee he listened to all views with perfect amenity, drew out conflicting opinions, put opponents in better temper with one another, summed up with impartial humour and promoted adjustment.

VI

In the midst of the successive Irish crises and of his concurrent financial troubles, he engaged in literary employment of a kind for which he never again had leisure. At a time when statesmen wrote freely for the monthly periodicals he contributed some articles to the *Nineteenth Century* and the American reviews. But also he wrote a play; and set down his dry inventory, totally undramatic in style, of his own intensely dramatic career from 1880 to 1892.

Since the old days of amateur theatricals he had lost nothing of his love for the theatre. His appreciation uncommonly gratified Henry Irving, the commanding actor of that day. Since his youth Chamberlain had always toyed with the thought of turning playwright. His political style might be supposed to promise quick dialogue on the stage.

In the winter of 1891-92 he did finish a piece called "The Game of Politics", which still exists in the exemplary manuscript of a secretary, but is pretty sure to remain unproduced. It was shown to Beerbohm Tree, who advised shrewdly against any attempt to put it on the boards. "Sure of reputation in one sphere, why should Chamberlain risk failure in another?" Pointed phrase cannot of itself make drama. For the matter of action, outward or inward, no verbal expertness can be a substitute. Chamberlain was full of practical imagination about things to be done under his personal direction; but nothing shows that his psychological sense was what drama requires, or that he possessed its vital inventiveness with regard either to situation or personalisation. In the notion of succeeding as a playwright he only repeated the foible of Richelieu. Gladstone was a consummate actor of his own part. We cannot conceive him writing a play. On the other hand, Sheridan, who enchanted the theatre and had high successes in histrionic oratory, was no master of

political action. Cobden as a young man wrote a rejected play and a vapid comedy. For Chamberlain the author's task gave novel occupation and recalled gaily the amateur theatricals of his earlier years. CHAP.
XLII.
Æt. 53-56.

A passing glance must be thrown upon an academic contrast. It was of a sort new to him, though soon to become accustomed. Hartington succeeding as Duke of Devonshire was chosen to be Chancellor of Cambridge University and invited his Radical Unionist colleague to receive the honorary degree of LL.D. Other recipients were the Duke of Cambridge, John Morley and old Lord Cranbrook, who put a word or two in his diary:

The House was crammed but the galleries were not very witty and only rather interrupted the Public Orator, who did his disagreeable duty well. H.R.H. had a warm reception, the rest of us except Chamberlain, moderate.¹

In the same period Chamberlain dictated at length his memoir, or rather his memorandum, of events from 1880 to 1892. It makes a bulk of manuscript sheets close-written on bluish folio. Containing nothing about his non-political life, and giving few indications of personality, it is rather a calendar of his acts, a register of documents and an index to supplementary material. Sometimes he enters briefly into a general explanation of his line of conduct and defends his motives. It is singular that Chamberlain, a considered artist in his speeches, takes no pains with his private records. They are clear and, as a rule, no more. To use the old jargon for want of better, he seems to have had objective imagination in the highest sense but no subjective imagination. He never gives a single picturesque touch to any sentence in his own account of himself. Self-justification he assumes in his different way as much as Gladstone did; but for the sympathy of others not one word appeals. His letters are often full of his energy and explosive phrases; when he writes from abroad he has graphic touches; but his is the opposite of the literary temperament. The few passages apt for quotation from the "Memorandum" have been fully used in this book. The inventory is particularly valuable as a guide to the means

¹ *Gathorne-Hardy, First Earl of Cranbrook*, vol. ii. p. 330.

BOOK IX. by which the Unionist alliance was kept in force through all
1889-92. difficulties and was finally consolidated in 1891. Henceforward
that alliance is the ruling factor of British politics and becomes
a strong influence in the world. Chamberlain supersedes Gladstone as a leader in living touch with the time.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

(1891)

THE Turn of the Tide in 1891—Chamberlain's National Activity—His Force on the Platform—The Complete Combatant—Unionism and the New Social Impulses—He proposes Old Age Pensions—Liberalism demands a Wide Policy—The "Multifarious Programme" of Newcastle—An Omnibus with Home Rule inside—Disastrous Strategy—Chamberlain in his Element—A Campaign of Parody—Gladstone's Weakening Position—The Beginning of the End.

I

HOPELESS would be any attempt to follow him in detail through the constituencies in these years. Except from his place in Parliament he speaks very little in London. Otherwise he ranges Great Britain—from the Midlands to Scotland; from Scotland to Wales; from Northumberland and Durham to Devon and Cornwall. Yet he cannot accept more than a fraction of the requests. He follows on the track of Gladstone and other Liberal leaders.

CHAP.
XLIII.
Æt. 55.

Prominent statesmen forty years ago, in a manner no longer in use, were expected to answer each other. This sort of set-to was a national education but also a national diversion like boxing-shows. To British democracy it was not the least attraction—perhaps it was the chief—that the Radical Unionist was like a champion in "the ring", ready for all comers—"one down and t'other come on", as often was said. The platform duels were a large feature of public life, as you may see from endless pages of *The Times* and the *Annual Register*. In reply on the platform as in Parliament, Chamberlain's pugnacious resources are exhaustless. The opponents at his heels and on both sides cannot

BOOK
IX.
1891.

cut him off and dispatch him as they expect when he courts trouble on all hands—exasperating orthodox Toryism by his familiar free education fad and newer heresies, yet for all that, scoffing at “the People with a capital P”. Somehow he finds an exit from the tightest place and comes out fighting. In his dependence on his own force of hand, and in the risks he has to take just because he has no real resort whatever but his continued and single audacity, he is more like a character out of Dumas—out of the *Quarante-Cinq*, shall we say?—than like any other politician. Watch and ward, pounces or reprisals, are his concerns of every day and almost of every hour.

To stand on the defensive he could not be brought. Were he asked for his maxim, it would have been a variant on two familiar phrases about oratory and audacity. He would have said: “Attack—and again, attack—and always, attack”. How he keeps it up—how he varies in detail the everlasting Irish contention—is not less than astonishing. He repeats himself of course, as they do all, but to a far less extent than might be thought unavoidable. As the controversy passes into the 'nineties, after years of dispute on one issue, his rising stress on the Imperial appeal and his confidence in pointing to progressive legislation under a Conservative Ministry, give a fresh kind of force and colour to his addresses.

The destructive art he now practises is political cross-examination. In this method no one equals him. He asks the Gladstonians for “details” of their new Home Rule measure. When they refuse to answer, he states for them their different and equally unpromising possibilities. That there is no path they can choose but will lead them into the middle of a quagmire, he shows to the fervent satisfaction of his Unionist audiences. Many Liberals and Nationalists who detest his purpose are forced to feel that the practical outcome will be what he predicts.

Experienced commentators, Mr. Lloyd George amongst them, have recommended Chamberlain's speeches in the autumn of 1885 as the best of all models for young politicians to copy. In another way his platform method half a decade later—some excrescences disregarded—shows a perfected technique of combat. There never is a jaded passage. He improves to the utmost one quality in which long since he had attained high excellence.

As his concise animation states a case, he carries forward the intelligence of his audience, never giving out in one sentence more than they instantly apprehend. He takes care, by dropping his tones to the lowest above a whisper, to secure a pause and a hush of expectation before giving the most telling delivery to a chief point and bringing down the house. He owes as much to the arrangement of his matter and ordering of his arguments as to direct lucidity of words. Eloquent in the old, expansive way he is not, but his method is so much more efficient for purposeful politics under democratic conditions that he does more than anyone to supersede the grandiose style of speaking.

CHAP.
XLIIL.
Æt. 55.

II

In 1891 he springs into redoubled activity with a vigour of confidence and a reach of suggestion that he has not shown since before the Home Rule split.

Parnell has fallen; the Irish part of the Opposition is paralysed in the House of Commons; their internecine quarrels in Ireland are of Unionist pleasures the cheapest and most natural; while the same repugnant spectacle destroys amongst Liberals the romantic spell of the earlier Home Rule appeal. Chamberlain has secured free education and looks forward to small holdings and Irish local government. The worst troubles between the Unionist sections are over in Birmingham itself, where henceforth the alliance works smoothly and solidly up to the General Election. He knows, what Liberals of Lord Rosebery's school feel equally, that the popular tide is turning surely against the Gladstonian tradition in foreign and colonial policy. He sees, since the dock strike of 1889 and the rapid rise of a new Trades Unionism, the beginning of some kind of distinctive Labour movement in politics. He is sure—or at least means, if he can, to make sure—that the demand for social legislation in Great Britain shall bear down the heroic veteran's Irish obsession.

In short, Chamberlain feels that the hunt is up against the Gladstonian policy. The quarry may make a good run yet. He will be in at the death, after all.

He is the quickest of statesmen to discern the signs of a new democratic future. As early as the autumn of 1890, when he is

BOOK
IX.
1891.

on the other side of the Atlantic, he remarks from Salem, "Above all, the labour question will be troublesome". From the opening of 1891 he has determined to press the pace and broaden the scope of Unionist reform. Again and again, he stresses the necessity for a new programme taking serious account of the labour question, if Unionists mean to make the strongest case at next year's General Election—henceforth, and inevitably, the central concern in his outlook. If Liberals this next time, after six years of controversy, cannot win a decisive victory on Home Rule lines, they never will win on those lines. Chamberlain feels himself a modern on social questions by comparison with the Liberal leaders.

Gladstone and Morley, the latter perhaps most, dislike the miners' demand for a statutory eight-hours day—then a novel, and to many an alarming, proposition. The Radical Unionist is ready to concede it. He sympathises with miners as with other workers under hard conditions—fishermen, merchant seamen, crofters, rural labourers. At the request of the Government, he accepts the chairmanship of a Royal Commission on the effect of coal dust in causing explosions in mines. It held many sittings through the next couple of years, and its results were useful.

III

In the spring of 1891, after a good deal of meditation and dubiety, he struck out a new line, and made the most daring of his advances as a Unionist democrat. He raised nothing less than the question of old-age pensions.

Like every other statesman of the day with a fore-sighted general sense of the coming claims and power of democracy, he was deeply influenced by that side of Bismarck's constructive policy which was loosely called State Socialism—though, so far from having anything in common with Karl Marx, it was part of a direct alternative, to no small degree effective. Germany led the world by the legislation of 1889—imposing on employers and employed a contributory system of old-age pensions supplemented by State aid. Then the London dock strike in a most curious way gave birth to a new social conscience and to new political emotions, and was followed by the spread of

Trades Unionism amongst workers hitherto unorganised. In the long run, the Labour party of the future was to develop slowly from these origins. This was not conceived by either Liberals or Unionists. Meanwhile, Chamberlain was influenced alike by German example in practical reform and by this new social conscience awakened in Great Britain when the hardships and oppressions amongst unorganised labour were revealed.

CHAP.
XLIH.
Æt. 55.

It was innately characteristic of his ways that, instead of arranging carefully to stage himself in the national limelight as the author of a great departure, he was led to a sudden resolve by a local incident. There was a by-election toward in Aston Manor—a constituency within his sphere of influence. The seat at first was not thought too safe. The Unionist majority had been less than 800 in 1886—the kind of figure that the Gladstonians at this time were accustomed to wipe out in other parts of the country. From Chamberlain's standpoint this was a fight for a key position, and he threw his whole strength into the struggle. Such a concentrated and effectual effort as he made to alter an initial situation in a single constituency, is unknown in connection with by-elections in our days. Here is a first-class statesman fighting for one seat with the utmost exertion of every particle in his being, as though the result of a whole General Election were at stake. He must have swung over a thousand votes in Aston Manor.

The notable date was March 17, 1891; and as the advocacy of old-age pensions, for the first time by any foremost political leader, was no ordinary event in the annals of democratic development in Great Britain, we may venture some quotation from the living accents, in its hour, of a speech which after forty years is not quite dead like most old speeches:

What is it that the working classes of the country want? What is it that they have the right to demand? I will see if I can put your aspirations, your expectations, into short, clear and succinct language. You shall tell me if I fail. I say, in the first place, you want good wages and constant employment. I say, in the second place, you want more leisure and better means of enjoying it. And I say, in the third place, I think you want some provision for your old age, so that when declining years come you may not be forced to look forward to the cold charities of the

BOOK
IX.
1891.

poorhouse as the end and reward of a long life of toil. That is my labour programme. Is it reasonable? (Cries of "Yes".) Is it attainable? (Renewed cries of "Yes".) Can the Government do anything to assist? (Cries of "Yes" and "Should do".) I say that there is no doubt as to the answer.

He went on to point out that, according to the latest returns, nearly 300,000 people over the age of sixty were forced to accept parish relief, "connected indissolubly with the idea of degradation". Giving it as his belief that the country was far from being prepared for a compulsory system, his own first idea at this moment was merely that the State should encourage voluntary saving by paying 5 per cent interest—at that time, we must remember, the normal rate was $2\frac{1}{2}$ —upon all accumulating deposits made by self-helping thrift as a provision for old age, the annuities beginning at sixty-five. This first modest proposal was an anti-climax by comparison with his eloquent exposition of the general case. But he had sown his grain of mustard-seed.

The result of the Aston by-election showed what his power in his own area had become, contrary to Liberal progress elsewhere. The Unionist majority was nearly quadrupled by comparison with 1886.¹

IV

The idea of old-age pensions went back to the eighteenth century. The subject had lately been taken up by a few earnest philanthropists, distressed, as well they might be, by the thought that in Britain, with its vast wealth, closing misfortune for the poor was a common case. A long life of toil and honesty might lead to pauperism and the workhouse. Amongst the comfortable classes the suggestion of State-assisted annuities was almost universally regarded as a notion from cloud-cuckoo-land. The masses themselves thought it an unattainable vision so far as they heeded it at all. No prominent English statesman had noticed it. For Chamberlain to take it up was a stroke that

¹ Aston Manor

1886		1891 (by-election, March 20)	
Unionist . . .	3495	Unionist . . .	5310
Gladstonian . . .	2713	Gladstonian . . .	2332
Majority . . .	782	Majority . . .	2978

startled the country into attention. Though his earnest personal dream was thwarted afterwards by the dull reluctance of his colleagues and by the unforeseen expense of world policy and of war, he alone brought old-age pensions into practical politics, so that it never slept afterwards. That glory cannot be denied him, and it is generously admitted by those who sympathise with little else in his Unionist career. His action, as a Prime Minister of our day, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, says, "was a seed from which a mustard tree of a movement grew".

The name of the member for West Birmingham can never be dissociated from these pensions, and the part he played in making them practical politics can never be gainsaid.¹

At Portsmouth on April 2—a couple of weeks after the Aston speech—he returned to the charge, and did not find his Unionist audience in an undemocratic mood. He asserted—just as he had been insisting through eight years before—that the conditions and the claims of Labour were the great problem of the day. "Wealth has poured into the country. (Loud cheers.) Have the masses of the people had their fair and full share of the prosperity which has been enjoyed?" (Cries of "No".) He went on to show how vastly the interests of the working classes had been advanced by parliamentary action in the course of a generation. Why not achieve further improvements by the same method? "There are still according to the last returns one in forty of the men, women and children in the country in receipt of parish relief. . . . Are these things necessary? Are they not a disgrace and scandal to our civilisation?" He developed his argument for old-age pensions:

I can give you some rather curious and startling figures in connection with this subject. I find that of the old people in the United Kingdom above the age of sixty, rich and poor alike, one in seven is at the present moment in receipt of parish relief—one in seven of every old person above the age of 60. . . . It is a deplorable thing that so large a part of our industrial population in their declining years should find themselves compelled to have recourse to the poor law for their subsistence. . . . I

¹ Ramsay MacDonald, "Mr. Chamberlain as a Social Reformer" in *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, by various writers (Associated Newspapers Ltd.), p. 186.

BOOK
IX.
1891.

desire the intervention of the Government and the assistance of the State. . . . There is a precedent for such a course in the German law of insurance, where, in addition to the contributions of the workmen and the employers, the State finds a proportionate contribution. . . . I should be satisfied with trying this as a voluntary experiment, and I believe that in a short time its advantages would be found so great that they would commend themselves to the majority of working men.

Other proposals in the same speech include a large extension of agricultural allotments and small holdings; universal insurance of workmen against accidents, the cost to be borne by the business as a matter of course; stricter supervision of the Friendly Societies and other provident institutions so as to secure the better working of existing voluntary insurance against sickness; amendment of the Factory Acts; and stronger housing legislation.

During the next few years all this, and more like it, was absurdly called the State Socialism of an imitation Bismarck. However influenced by the steady humane development of German legislation, Chamberlain was only moving ahead on his own lines. His own conception was a Red Cross service for the competitive industrial system, to bring in the wounded, to succour the disabled and infirm. That he wished to gain votes need not be denied. Has any leader of any party in any country and in any age of democratic politics not desired to gain them? Did Gladstone desire them for Home Rule? Are Labour and Liberal statesmen of to-day engaged upon the austere purpose of repelling popular support? Was Chamberlain before 1886 less eager for it than afterwards?

This of all charges is pharisaical fudge. From his boyhood, through his years as an employer, in his municipal career, we have seen Chamberlain engaged personally in social service, ardent in his visions of raising the condition of the people and tireless in his effort. After his money losses, as Canon Smith has told us, when in the interests of his family his ceaseless contributions ought to have been more curtailed, he was never proof against "a tale of genuine distress". He deeply desired the increasing security and happiness of the humbler amongst his fellow-creatures. As the present writer can well testify, the old impulse, the old dream, never left him while he lived. In that

respect the moral force of his Unitarian upbringing—despite his subsequent inability to find a spiritual mainstay in the formal tenets of that or any sect—gave continuity to his life's endeavour. He might have made much of this record had he been capable of warm sentimentalism.

CHAP.
XLIII.
Æt. 55.

But Chamberlain lacked pathos altogether. He never could employ the moving appeal to public sentimentalism—the most tempting device in democratic politics, the most unfailing of effect. Had he been of softer metal, could he have practised to deceive by the plausible flow of feeling on platforms and in the House of Commons, how general and irrespective of party would have been the belief in his humanity. He never in his life made a speech such as a great emotional demagogue might have framed with overwhelming effect, claiming sympathy with himself personally on account of the saving of human life and promotion of human happiness resulting from his Birmingham administration and his shipping crusade, and his repeated plans through a decade for the permanent relief by State action of Irish poverty.

With the old diligence of preparation—the same now as when he grappled with the earlier “unauthorised programme” or with the education question in his first political phase—he went to work on the novel subject of old-age pensions; covering sheets and sheets of blue foolscap with notes in his minute writing, methodically setting over against each other every pro and con. In a few weeks from starting the subject he had got together a voluntary parliamentary Committee (appointed May 13, 1891), and Chamberlain was elected Chairman. He notes:

This Committee met many times, and having settled certain principles referred the consideration of details to a sub-Committee consisting of Dr. Hunter, Mr. Mallock, Mr. Rankin and myself. The Committee met at Highbury on October 24, and agreed on a scheme to be submitted to the actuary. This was subsequently altered in conference between the actuary and myself, and with some further amendments by the parliamentary Committee was adopted in 1892.¹

Details of the document thus produced cannot be given here.

¹ Chamberlain's “Memorandum”. The scheme adopted by the parliamentary Committee was published in *The Times* of May 21, 1892.

BOOK
IX.
1891.

The scheme contemplated the following main provision, "a State Pension Fund to which Parliament shall be asked to make an annual grant to be supplemented by local rates, thus augmenting voluntary contributions". The sum to be paid at sixty-five was only five shillings a week; but in the early 'nineties that amount meant twice as much as now. Even the great philanthropist, Charles Booth, proposed no higher rate, though advocating universal non-contributory relief.

Chamberlain's concern with old-age pensions will engage us repeatedly in successive years, and at the last when his conceptions rose to their grandest before the crash of his life.

V

The repulsive chaos of Nationalist dissensions in Ireland enabled the smallest as well as the best Unionists to maintain that the fable of the Kilkenny cats and the legend of Donnybrook fair were eternally typical of Ireland. In spite of everything, the Liberals continued to win by-elections at a rate promising them as they might well suppose a majority of over a hundred in the next House of Commons. But they found themselves compelled to appeal more and more to British popular interests. They relied less and less on the original theme—the Union of Hearts—the ideal picture of an Ireland brought nearer to Great Britain in spirit by loosening formal connection between the two islands.

The original strength of Gladstonianism lay just in its spiritual suggestion, which Chamberlain never in the least understood. The essence of his mind on Home Rule was expressed in a single sentence of one of his speeches: "I never will recognise a separate political nationality in Ireland".¹ He meant, of course, that he would never recognise a principle which would justify in theory, and perhaps might ultimately effect in practice, the separation of Scotland, Wales and Cornwall. Chamberlain's innate thought on the question was like Macaulay's a generation before—"Repeal the Union? Restore the heptarchy!" But the power of sympathetic sentiment had seemed to encroach upon the Unionist position like the sea on soft cliffs. He could only impede the

¹ Birmingham, May 28, 1888.

encroachment and construct props and masonry against it by his convinced argument that the idealistic suggestion was illusory; that "there was no halfway house between the unity of the British Isles under the Imperial Parliament and virtual separation".

CHAP.
XLIH.
Æt. 55.

Gradually the Gladstonians became conscious that the Irish policy by itself was a weakening appeal and that the demands of the new Radicalism must be met. Morley was amongst those who faced the change with extreme dislike and alarm. Early in 1888 he wrote to Chamberlain:

The anarchic follies of the London Radicals are playing the Tory game to a marvel. Indeed if these men are Radicals, I'm a Tory. We cannot win without accession of strength from the London constituencies, and that strength will never come so long as these blatant democrats persist in frightening the small shopkeeper, for one thing, and in standing aloof from organisation for another.¹

But that very year London Radicalism, mingled with the beginnings of Socialism, forced a change. At the end of 1888 Mr. Gladstone drove through a dense fog in December and visited the East End of London. His Limehouse programme proclaimed that the cause of British social reform was like a walled garden full of fruit to be plucked and gathered, but only accessible on one condition. "My high wall means the Irish Question. Until you either pull down the wall or find the keys and open the door, you will never bring the course of British legislation to what it ought to be". Chamberlain could easily argue that the orchard was already available and the forbidding wall demolished. A Unionist majority had broken the old power of Irish obstruction; that barrier, contended Chamberlain, could only be restored by Mr. Gladstone's own return to office.

After the London dock strike in 1889 the new demands of democracy exerted a pressure not to be withstood by official Liberalism. In the constituencies, especially in the rural, that party through the following two years from 1890 to 1892 had to link its advocacy of Home Rule with new appeals to the interests of the British electorate. The more extended became this strategy and the more complicated the tactics it implied,

¹ Morley to Chamberlain, February 8, 1888.

BOOK
IX.
1891.

the more was it exposed to Unionist assault. You could not fill up the foreground with the Irish Question and yet assert with convincing effect on the electorate the urgency of British democratic needs.

At length, at the beginning of October 1891, the Liberal Caucus held a great though motley gathering in the North. There at Newcastle-on-Tyne they adopted pell-mell and promiscuously the articles of a new catechism. The once-famous "multifarious programme" was framed to include an unparalleled variety of suggestions—every conceivable item supposed to attract votes mingling in the ecstatic jumble with every proposition certain to lose them. The National Liberal Federation demanded a full scheme of Home Rule; threatened the House of Lords; claimed public control of denominational schools; proposed the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church in Scotland as well as Wales; advocated on the temperance question local option to effect sporadic suppression of the liquor traffic, whereas public opinion in 1891 was entirely in favour of reducing the number of licences, but dead against patch-work prohibition. "One man, one vote" was proclaimed, with public liability for election expenses and payment of members. This capacious omnibus for baggage was not yet full, or there was room on the top for packages double-piled. The programme went on to enumerate district councils, parish councils and a reformed magistracy; compulsory powers to purchase land for allotments or other public purposes; compulsory registration of title and cheaper transfer of land; complete security for tenant-farmers' improvements; the protection of commons and the correction of primogeniture. All this latter part presented to the agricultural electorate an electioneering prospectus amounting to a cyclopaedia of rural possibilities.

An acute contemporary, Mr. Herbert Paul, may well say of these transactions that "there have seldom been two more disastrous days in the history of British Liberalism than the first and second of October 1891".¹ The Newcastle programme was like the haggis with "everything 'intil' it".

¹ *History of Modern England*, vol. v. p. 223.

VI

On October 2, however, Gladstone appeared at night in the Tyne Theatre to bless what he did not love. He was nearly eighty-two. More and more now he was to find that he had far outlived the time he understood. His great venerable head in those days seemed to make the rest of his well-made body look small. Of that contrast an eye-witness said fancifully, but with awe, that "his head looked like a white eagle perched on a black stump". His oration was the very last of all his ampler performances outside the House of Commons.

CHAP.
XLIII.
Æt. 55.

His long, formal benediction on the Newcastle programme no one took seriously. Only two things were salient. He went out of his way, most unwisely for his main purposes, to urge the speedy evacuation of Egypt. When he menaced the House of Lords, his old-fashioned action was as extraordinary and imposing as Chatham's, when he "bowed so low that you could see his hooked nose between his legs". On this occasion, when Gladstone on the stage of the Tyne Theatre came to his arraignment of the Peers, while he pronounced his condemnatory periods, he bent lower and lower towards the boards as though his knees would touch them, while stretching up his arms higher and higher towards Heaven. Thus he anathematised the sacrilegious suggestion that the House of Lords would reject Home Rule were any kind of majority created for it in the House of Commons.

Incidentally, we may ask here whether, by comparison with the Liberal Unionist, Gladstone's consistency was so much more symmetrical. In February 1885, we recall, he had unbosomed to Lord Acton his profound mistrust of social organisation according to Birmingham.

Tory democracy . . . is demagogism. The liberalism of to-day is better . . . yet far from being good. Its pet idol is what they call construction,—that is to say, taking into the hands of the State the business of the individual man. Both the one and the other have much to estrange me and have had for many, many years.¹

Gladstone had not changed his repugnance. He overcame it because he was assured that a wide approval of these perilous

¹ Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. iii. p. 173 (Gladstone to Acton, February 11, 1885).

BOOK

IX.

1891.

doctrines was necessary to reinforce Home Rule by concession to the nearer interests of a new race of men.

Partly he was as much misled by his party managers as in 1886 before the division on the second reading of the Home Rule Bill, and again before the subsequent dissolution. Partly he misled himself. Amongst increasing complications was this, that Liberalism, especially in the great commercial centres, was no longer solid against the new Imperialism. On the day after his oration many Liberals in Newcastle-on-Tyne itself murmured against premature withdrawal from Egypt. There was no general appetite for a doubtful campaign against the House of Lords on a new Home Rule Bill yet unknown, but certain to be very assailable. The attitude towards Gladstone amongst his followers in Newcastle was far less devout than the reverence and obedience of a few years before. Similar feelings spread through the country. Influenced like Chamberlain by the atmosphere of the new era, a younger Liberal school—Rosebery, Asquith, Grey, Haldane—were no more enthusiastic than the Radical Unionist for withdrawal from the Nile. These latent disagreements were to result some years later in another convulsion of Liberalism.

The Newcastle proceedings were followed in a very few days by Parnell's death. We may almost say that they sealed in the British constituencies the fate of Gladstone's Home Rule movement. The "multifarious" method was a confused blunder. Liberals now presented the widest and most penetrable front that any party ever exposed to attack. On the aggressive they had gained large ground, harrying and assaulting the Government in every way. Gladstone had evaded the demand that he should put up a detailed Home Rule scheme to be bombarded to pieces before the elections. Now his precaution was frustrated. By an extravagant array of variegated proposals Liberals found themselves on the defensive along lines too extended and thin to be held. Every clique of faddists and cranks clamoured for inclusion in the already over-crowded medley of the programme; every settled interest was alarmed; everywhere, and for the most various reasons, diverse groups of voters were alienated and lost in a way that was soon to make all the difference at the polls between powerful success and Pyrrhic victory.

The Unionists became the happy critics and confident assailants, equipped with inexhaustible ammunition. Using Chamberlain's phrases, they claimed to be the "party of performance" against the "party of promises". Home Rule—they cried—hopelessly impeding this train of measures declared to be so requisite for the welfare and freedom of the British people, would reduce the Newcastle programme to futility and throw back all prospects of good legislation. On all their platforms and in all their journals, Unionists insisted with gusto that the omnium-gatherum programme was an electioneering burlesque.

CHAP.
XLIII.
Æt. 55.

VII

This situation, like nothing before it, was made for Chamberlain's powers of mockery. From Highbury he marked with pleasure the Newcastle confabulations. He felt that his enemies had delivered themselves into his hands. Within a few days thereafter he was in Wales, to the exhilaration of his audience and his own:

It is an absurd programme, an impracticable programme, and therefore a dishonest programme. It is a programme which begins by offering everything to everybody, and it will end by giving nothing to anybody. . . . Scotch disestablishment and Welsh disestablishment like a pair of disconsolate sisters must wait unconsolated in the lobby.

We are to have one man, one vote. Yes, I quite agree . . . and I am prepared to vote for it—only I am not prepared to vote for it alone. If we are going once more to put the Constitution in the melting-pot, let us get up a good fire. Let us go in for something worth having, and let us have a redistribution of seats. Let us do away with those absurd anomalies and with the greatest anomaly of all—that which gives to Ireland in proportion to population a representation 20 per cent better than it gives to England, Wales and Scotland.

In another passage he likened the Programme, with the biggest-known "P", to "the capital of the bubble Company in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which consisted of the figure one and as many noughts after it as the printer could cram into the page".¹ Sunderland a week later heard him in the same vein: "I belong to what I

¹ At Highmead, Llanybyther, Carmarthenshire, October 13.

BOOK
IX.
1891.

suppose is at this moment the best abused of political parties, and I think I may venture to say that of that party I am the best abused man". On his devoted head opprobrium had exhausted "all the resources of a most capable vocabulary". He met an interrupter—"You may laugh now, but let those laugh who win. You cannot!"

Some passages are typical of his unflagging satire at this period:

[On the spectacle of a Gladstonian Cabinet.] . . . Fancy them trying to harmonise the political economy of Mr. Tom Mann and Mr. John Morley. Fancy them endeavouring to satisfy at once in their foreign policy Mr. Labouchere and Lord Rosebery. And then fancy them, in their leisure time, occupied in repealing the Union, in abolishing the House of Lords, in disestablishing the Church and in shutting up every public-house. . . . I do not think it can be necessary for me to say very much about the Newcastle programme. . . . How shall I describe it to you? I should like to define it scientifically and I am inclined to take my definition from the science of geology. If, as I hope, there are some miners present, they will be able to understand me. Gentlemen, the Newcastle programme is a conglomerate. If you look in the books a conglomerate is a congeries of various fragments subjected to great pressure and friction, and brought together from vast distances by many and various powerful agencies. (Loud laughter.) I see that you catch the analogy. The Newcastle programme is indeed a heterogeneous congeries of various fragments of every programme under the sun and brought together by the powerful agency of a local caucus. . . . "Pudding stone" is the popular name.¹

By contrast with that raillery, he brought heavy fire to bear upon Gladstone's policy of evacuating Egypt. That suggestion had excited throughout Europe a belief that the next Liberal Government would be amenable to pressure:

The rulers of more than one great European Power are beginning to look forward with hope and anticipation—and beginning to believe that they will be able to obtain from our weakness concessions which they know they cannot secure from their own strength.

I have been in Egypt, I have studied the question on the spot. I know

¹ Sunderland, October 21, 1891.

what has been done there. I do not believe that the majority of my countrymen have any conception of the good work which has been performed by a few Englishmen in that country. It has been the resurrection of a nation, and at the present time Egypt which five or six years ago was on the brink of ruin, its people trodden down to the earth, has now once more attained to a state of prosperity which it has not known since the time of the Pharaohs.

CHAP.
XLIII.
Æt. 55.

With all its force, colour and banter this onslaught at Sunderland was the speech which led to the long interruption—the end, it appeared at the time—of the friendship with Morley. Chamberlain, replying directly to Gladstone's recent orations in the neighbouring borough of Newcastle, made an unusual number of personal allusions to that statesman. They were not in the least outrageous. But he said indiscreetly, though truly, with reference to former Cabinet affairs, that in his fight for saving life at sea Gladstone had given him very little support. This gave Morley his text when he accused Chamberlain in effect of one of the meanest recorded blows below the belt. But the references to Gladstone were not the real matter of irritation. In this same Sunderland speech Chamberlain made a number of polite but stinging references to John Morley himself, represented as the philosopher of scuttle in Imperial affairs and of *laissez-faire* in social policy. This in truth was the human cause of Morley's outburst and the rupture.

VIII

Next, at Birmingham, Chamberlain found new phrases and catchwords for Unionist writers and speakers. He furnished them then, as for a decade and a half to come, with more cues than all their other leaders put together could supply. The Newcastle programme is now pictured as "a gigantic system of log-rolling, in which everyone is to vote for something which he does not want, and which he does not approve, in order to get something else which he especially desires". By comparison he stuck to it that the Unionist social programme was as much better in itself as more attainable. His destructive passages at this time, as at most times in his life, are subordinated to constructive policy.

BOOK
IX.
1891.

For instance, in this speech to his constituents he makes another ardent plea for old-age pensions. The question was under enquiry. He could not yet commit himself to a plan. Compulsory schemes at that stage were impracticable, though he regretted the fact. There must be some voluntary system first. "Perhaps, as in the case of education, when the voluntary system has been exhausted, then public opinion will agree to a compulsory measure." He warned his hearers, as he continually did, against entertaining exaggerated opinions of what could be done. But in spite of all his careful qualifications the passage he stamped upon the imagination of Unionist democracy in the Midlands was this: "You see, gentlemen, I have not altogether forgotten the doctrine of ransom, though I am very willing to confess the word was not very well chosen. . . . The soldiers and the sailors are pensioned. Yes, but peace hath her victories as well as war; and the soldiers of industry, when they fall out of the ranks in the great conflict and competition in which they are continually engaged—they also have some claim to the consideration and gratitude of their country."¹

After he began to popularise the idea of old-age pensions, then regarded as the gate to Utopia, his letter-bag was swollen by hundreds of communications aggravating his daily plague—"the curse of correspondence" or, as he sometimes called it, his lifelong drudgery. All manner of solutions were pressed upon his notice. One waft from Laputa was of a beautiful felicity. Unfortunately, when he came to examine the scheme he found that it would cost £200,000,000 to establish and £50,000,000 a year to maintain.

The few specimens quoted in this chapter must serve to suggest his platform power at the beginning of the 'nineties—the vigour and comedy of his speeches, their democratic breadth, their rousing accent on Imperial questions and their indefatigable initiative in all ways. He sustained this style through the short but singular period of nine months or so from the autumn manœuvres of Liberalism in 1891 to the polls of mid-summer 1892.

A General Election was in sight. Whether it might be accelerated by a few months or retarded by as much he did not so

¹ Birmingham Town Hall, November 18, 1891.

greatly care, though of late he had a decided opinion, as we shall see, about the selection of the moment. He knew well that he was now pulling more strongly in the country than any other man. The issue raised in 1886 would be tried by the constituencies after these six distorted years of tumult and hatred, confusion and achievement. At first, with his back to the wall, he had to fight for his very life, and many shrewd witnesses thought he had not a hundred-to-one chance against Gladstone and Parnell together when, in the spring of 1886, the Caucus he had constructed was about to be turned against him. By contrast with the black Christmas of 1885—when all the best hopes and connections of his earlier political life were collapsing together—at the Christmas of 1891 he felt absolutely certain that one way or another he would win. In any case, he was determined, in view of the fight at the polls, and in that fight, to act upon the injunction of Dean Jackson to Peel on leaving Oxford—"Work like a tiger".

The Liberals were still winning by-elections, but at a slackening rate. Here and there they might still gain a signal success in the counties. Chamberlain's usual enquiries in detail satisfied him that in the great boroughs Unionism was in the ascendant, and that if Gladstone gained any semblance of success he would secure it by a nominal majority more tragic than defeat.

CHAP.
XLIII.
Æt. 55.

BOOK X

1892–1895

CHAPTER XLIV

THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1892—GLADSTONE'S LAST GOVERNMENT

(1892)

TOWARDS the Polls—Liberal Unionist Leadership—Chamberlain succeeds Hartington—The Conservative Government still too slow—Efforts and Checks—A Fiasco on Irish Local Government—Gladstone's Enchanting Phase—Chamberlain "Gets it"—More Unionist Jars—Mr. Austen Chamberlain, M.P.—Chamberlain and Northern Ireland—The Ulster Convention—End of the First Unionist Parliament—Gladstone's Last General Election—Chamberlain sweeps the Midlands—Liberalism in a Fatal Position—The Change of Government.

I

A FEW days before Christmas 1891 the old Duke of Devonshire died. Hartington was removed from the legislative Chamber where he had sat continuously from the age of twenty-five to nearly sixty. To his position in the House of Commons there was but one possible successor. Chamberlain became leader of both the Liberal Unionist sections in that House, the new Duke remaining titular chief of the whole party.

CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56.

Not unimportant either for the subject of these pages or for Parliament itself was this change. It threw Chamberlain personally into more salient relief. Added freedom and authority assisted to raise his style in debate to that mature perfection of its kind now recognised by friend and foe.

It must be confessed that his selection for this new honour and responsibility was more formally than morally unanimous. The Whiggish section of the Liberal Unionists in the Commons were much the more numerous. The wealthier amongst con-

BOOK
X.
1892.

tributors to the party funds held the same views. Among all these there was some momentary talk of asking a colleague who had long enjoyed close personal intimacy with Hartington to become his successor, instead of the man who had forced free education on the Conservative Government, who was a dis-establisher in principle, and had now begun to speak of old-age pensions and of other disturbing hallucinations.

Sir Henry James, with immediate good sense though not perhaps without a sigh—amiably ambitious as at heart he was—put aside a foolish and mischievous notion: “Upon this suggestion appearing in the Press I at once wrote to Chamberlain repudiating it and saying I would with pleasure serve under him as loyally as he had served under Hartington”.¹ Chamberlain’s reply was in strict terms:

December 23, 1891.— . . . Personally I shrink from accepting further responsibility, and wish that some way could be found to avoid it. But if this is not possible, I am ready to do whatever the party think best. In view, however, of the special malignity with which the Gladstonians pursue me I think it absolutely necessary to my acceptance of the position of Leader that the Liberal Unionist party in the House of Commons should express an unanimous wish for my service, and without this I should not feel justified in assuming that character. . . .”²

Staunch was the Duke’s own support. The Liberal Unionists met accordingly on February 8, 1892, at the beginning of the session. The leader-designate had found further reason for making it clear that he was not prepared to fetter his independent judgment.

Articles had appeared both in *The Times* and the *Standard* suggesting that I might properly moderate my views in consideration of a position of great responsibility. I thought it desirable to point out the folly of this and the importance of maintaining in all respects the Liberal principles which we had not deserted when we left Mr. Gladstone on the Home Rule question. I stated my intention of continuing to support by vote, and in any other way that seemed fitting, the disestablishment of the State church.³

This statement administered to the larger part of his following

¹ Lord Askwith, *Lord James of Hereford* (1930), p. 224.

² *Ibid.* p. 225.

³ Chamberlain’s “Memorandum”.

a very bitter pill. It had to be swallowed. The meeting fulfilled his condition, election by absolute unanimity. Some days before, the Gladstonians had captured Hartington's old constituency of Rossendale. For the moment Liberal confidence became boundless, but all these adverse by-elections strengthened Chamberlain's personal hand in insisting on progressive Unionism.

CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56.

When Parliament reassembled, the House of Commons presented a sight disturbing to older members, so many and strange were the personal changes. Parnell, who had once seemed the arbiter of destiny in that Chamber, was mingled with its historic shadows since his death during the recess. The former Leader of the House, W. H. Smith, had passed away. Hartington, after nearly five-and-thirty years of membership, was removed. On the Treasury Bench Arthur Balfour was the new Leader of the House. In the seat so long occupied by the Whig Unionist's lounging and slumberous figure, sat his physical and mental opposite, the Radical Unionist, sinewy and ready, *toujours en vedette* as Bismarck said in another connection. A contemporary sketch shows Chamberlain with folded arms, impassive until he springs into action, but under the forward tilt of his hat watching the House with level eye. More fiercely resented than ever was his obtrusive presence on the same bench with Gladstone and his colleagues. Next to Gladstone he was much the most marked figure in the House.

Some short while before his equally singular and powerful position was described by the diligent parliamentary chronicler of the time:

Mr. Chamberlain is personally a more potent influence to-day than he has been at any earlier period of a busy and prosperous life. The political principle he avows is every day loosening its hold on the section of the country that once avowed it. Bye-election after bye-election has dealt him and his party a series of heavy blows. Such demonstration of public opinion taking practical effect in cutting off his following would seem to point to the gradual weakening and final decay of the power of the principal personage in the party. As long as he could command some seventy votes he was, naturally, a power in the House of Commons; with the party diminished in numbers, it would be reasonable to look for

BOOK
X.
1892.

some lowering of the leader's crest, some indication of the undermining of his power. Mr. Chamberlain's personality is so strong, his ability so conspicuous, and his generalship so brilliant, that his influence accumulates though his party decays.¹

The whole House felt that this was the expiring session of the first Unionist Parliament, and that the next General Election might decide for many a year one way or the other the future of British politics.

II

As leader prospective of Liberal Unionism in the House of Commons, Chamberlain had lost no time in getting to work. Confident enough of the future, he intended to make the most of every chance—to "neglect no means", as Cromwell enjoined. Changing his former wish to hasten the appeal to the people, he now advocated a full, fruitful session and advised deferring a dissolution until autumn.

In advance of the meeting of Parliament he presses privately vigorous counsels on the Conservative leaders. Let them not only bring in a good Irish Local Government Bill, but place it without fail on the Statute-book. Let them accept compulsory powers for local authorities to acquire land as a principle of the Small Holdings Bill, soon to be introduced at his urging. Let them bring forward a measure giving every person injured in his employment "an absolute right to compensation by means of a system of accident insurance".² Let them not forget Scotland, but pass some further legislation for the crofters. In short, let them, the Conservative leaders, forget nothing in view of a General Election so momentous. As a characteristic trait this is almost diverting, though he meant it grimly enough. He did not disguise that, though he wanted these measures for their own sake, he wanted them also for electoral utility.

To nothing like his own conception of a constructive and fighting policy on thoroughly Radical Unionist lines could he persuade the Conservative Government. The legislative record of the short session has been anticipated. A travesty of County

¹ Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Salisbury Parliament*, p. 403.

² Chamberlain to A. J. Balfour, January 19, 1892.

Councils as established in Great Britain, the Irish Local Government Bill was a fiasco, to Chamberlain's vexation. It may be said to have died of derision, though for form's sake it passed Second Reading by a large majority, a few days before the dissolution was determined. The Small Holdings Act, carried through, was good as far as it went. But odious to Conservatives was the compulsory principle, and nothing could induce them to propose it. Since he could not explain to the House what had been his private representations to Ministers, this involved the Radical Unionist in serious tactical difficulty, and gave Gladstone a celebrated victory in badinage.

CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56.

On his first intervention in debate as Liberal Unionist leader, at the opening of the session of 1892, the last of that Parliament, he had all the satisfaction he could desire and scored one of the greatest successes of his career. As an accomplished parliamentary performance he had never touched it. Many contemporary accounts agree that it was brilliant in the proper sense of that diluted word. The talk on the Address had become "dull as a great thaw". When he made his own irruption into debate he roused all sides of the House. How did it come, he enquired, that the Opposition, so loud in the Recess—when they framed the Newcastle programme—had made a meek reappearance in Parliament? Was it true that Schnadhorst could not promise his party a majority of more than thirty at the next General Election? Was it true that he promised any majority at all? As to conditions of Imperial supremacy in connection with Home Rule who could reconcile the views of anti-Parnellites and Parnellites? Who could reconcile the views of either with Liberal assurances? What on earth would the next Home Rule Bill be like? On the sedulous avoidance of confession in that respect Chamberlain chaffed Harcourt, and asked for "a little reciprocity" in candour. "He knows my plan—will he not tell me something about his?"¹ Then, on Egypt more militant passages assailed the Opposition. In the recess, Gladstone and Morley had proclaimed a policy of evacuation. Now Harcourt on the first night of the debate breathed no word in that sense. After working mischief on the platform the Opposition leaders were "silent as mice" in the House. To allow the country we had saved to relapse into

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. i. (February 11, 1892).

BOOK
X.
1892.

anarchy or leave it to be rescued from anarchy by the intervention of a foreign Power would be "cowardly and unworthy of this nation".¹ Morley followed immediately, but did not shine. A speaker sometimes quite consummate in prepared effects on the platform, he never rose to first rank in debate.

The new Leader of the House, Arthur Balfour, reports with lively admiration in his letter to the Queen:

February 11.— . . . The debate on the Address was resumed by Mr. Chamberlain in a speech of extraordinary brilliance and force. . . . Mr. Morley replied with considerable irritation but not much effect.²

Her Majesty's own note is:

February 14.— . . . Mr. Chamberlain behaves extremely well and has made an excellent speech about Egypt.

III

Next was brought in the Irish Local Government Bill. It was neither one thing nor another—neither fish, flesh, fowl nor good red herring. County Councils in the other island were to be established as distrusted institutions subject to admonishment and punishment. They might be "put in the dock" on allegation of misconduct made by twenty ratepayers. If found guilty by judicial pronouncement these elected representatives might be ejected and replaced by the Lord-Lieutenant's nominees. Balfour introduced this unlucky measure in a tone of deprecation, as who should say it was an ill-favoured thing which he was loath to acknowledge for his own. Rarely in the records of the House of Commons has any Bill been received with a more spontaneous riot of hilarity by an Opposition or with a more complete lack of joy by Ministerialists.

Harcourt joined with gusto in the onslaught. Too tempting was the opportunity to turn against Chamberlain that statesman's inimitable art of contrasting different Opposition utterances or silences. Harcourt chose to call this hapless specimen of malformation—in the medical sense—"a Birmingham Bill".

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. i. (February 11, 1892).

² *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. ii. p. 99, p. 102.

And as Chamberlain for the moment happened not to be in his place, "Dugald Dalgetty" cried, "Talk of running away!"¹ CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56. Coming in, Chamberlain turned the tables in a speech lasting only a few minutes. Harcourt's harangue was "in his best and latest Whitechapel style". This raised high merriment at the expense of an assailant who had expatiated on a Whitechapel platform the evening before. The Liberal Unionist leader won Balfour's gratitude by some brief ready-witted casuistry on behalf of the Bill.²

Three months later in a more serious effort (May 23) he helped powerfully to secure the unlooked-for majority of 92 by which the Second Reading of the Bill that nobody liked or wanted was carried to no purpose.³ Unionists were careful to see that it formed no noticeable part of their window-dressing when the General Election quickly ensued. Chamberlain did his best for the Conservative Government in this affair, but his heart was not in it. The thing was as far as possible from being what Harcourt had called it, "a Birmingham Bill". Chamberlain hated shams, but in the course of political compromise he sometimes, like all other practising statesmen, had to put up with them and to profess that they were good.

IV

That same spring he asserted the progressive independence strictly stipulated when he accepted the Liberal Unionist leadership. In March he went beyond Morley and many other Gladstonians by speaking in favour of the Second Reading of the Miners' Eight Hours' Bill. He argued generally that a reduction of the hours of work then usual was desirable in all laborious trades and would not necessarily decrease production.

"Long hours mean listless work, inefficient work, and even bad work, and there is a maximum above which you cannot go with any efficiency in the labour". Legislation was better than strikes. The Bill would "extend the functions of the State; and I want to know whether there is really anyone nowadays who is prepared to abide by the strict doctrine of *laissez-faire*, which

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. i. (February 18, 1892).

² *Ibid.* same date.

³ *Ibid.* vol. iv. (May 23, 1892).

BOOK

X.

1892.

perhaps twenty years ago was accepted as preferable to that other doctrine of constant niggling and unreasonable and imprudent interference which preceded it. . . ." He went on to quote Professor Jevons to the effect that "the State is justified in passing any law, or even in doing any single act, which in its ulterior consequences added to the sum of human happiness".

None the less the brightest day of a dull session found Chamberlain at a rare disadvantage in Parliament, though neither this nor anything could check him for more than the moment. The Small Holdings Bill was steered into Committee. Liberals of course moved for the principle of compulsory provision. Chamberlain admitted that the amendment would improve the Bill, but as it would also destroy the Bill—Conservative objection being immovable—he would vote against compulsion rather than lose the measure.² Where any other man might have been apologetic here was an adept audacity of frankness. It exemplifies his policy of pushing on the Salisbury Government when he could and maintaining it when he failed to persuade. This could only be done through six years by getting into fixes and getting out of them. The tactical move on the present occasion—perhaps the most typical of the awkward moments in these years—was necessary; but for the author of the Radical Programme it was not nice. Everyone knew that had nothing else been at stake he could have made a devastating speech on the other side of the argument.

On this April day Mr. Gladstone had his opportunity. By now the grandeur of his oratory was less sovereign, but never had his eloquence been so mellow, gracious, familiar and fascinating as in these closing years, and never had he been so popular in the House of Commons. He turned now from the Speaker directly towards Chamberlain, whose position on the same bench became for once a dramatic disadvantage—and he included in his attention Jesse Collings, who sat immediately behind Chamberlain. Upon them both he practised inimitable courtesies, and bantered the apostles of "three acres and a cow" until the House rocked:

I will not ask him to revert to his famous dicta by which he earned an immortality not perhaps altogether acceptable to his present humour;

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. ii. (March 23, 1892).

² *Ibid.* vol. iii. (April 8, 1892).

but I ask him in some degree to recall the sentiments cherished by him in his youth; and, in his middle age, to join with us—at least so far as reason will support our proposition—in something better than referring to the discretion and arbitrary will of the Government opposite to say whether some improvement in our law shall take place or not.¹

CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56.

The description of this scene by an eyewitness enables us to recall the life of the House of Commons at that time as though it were yesterday:

. . . So that no touch might be missing to complete the perfectness of the scene, just behind Mr. Chamberlain, sitting well forward on the bench with folded arms and honest face broadened to a grin of perhaps qualified appreciation, was Mr. Jesse Collings, "the hon. member for Bordesley, the faithful henchman of my right honourable friend, who would cordially re-echo that *or any other opinion*". . . . The pleasure Mr. Gladstone's gently scathing speech gave on that side of the House was not purely intellectual. . . . They hate their lost leader with a hate that is more than hate. Singly or in battalion, they are impotent against him in debate. There are in truth only three men in the House who can measure swords with Mr. Chamberlain, and here was the greatest of all slashing and cutting with infinite grace and skill, with effect all the greater because the onslaught was free from the slightest display of brutal force. Fighting practically single-handed, Mr. Chamberlain has held his own in the House of Commons through six turbulent sessions. Now at last he was "getting it".²

Contrasted so nearly on the same bench with Gladstone's all-expressive countenance, Chamberlain's command of feature was a mask. On this occasion no trace of discomfort could be discerned in his face, but his inward opinion of Conservative obtuseness cannot have been so equable. None of these temporary embarrassments or entanglements could deflect him a hair's-breadth from his determined line—that of worrying Conservative Ministers in private, but standing by them whenever he failed to propel them; keeping the Unionist alliance inexorably intact on the main cause, and bearing grimly all satire of his accommodations on other issues. If there be such a quality as steely inconsistency for a strategical purpose, it was his.

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. iii. (April 10, 1892).

² Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Salisbury Parliament*, p. 480.

BOOK
X.
1892.

He might well look serene. As it happened, a recent matter had given him personal recompense outweighing at the time everything else. His son Austen, then twenty-eight, had joined him in the House of Commons, to his infinite pleasure. A hitch in the Unionist alliance had been overcome. Chamberlain was devoted to all his children—strict father as he had been during their upbringing—but his whole heart was wrapped up in the political prospects of his eldest boy.

Thoroughly had he trained for politics a future Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary for India and Foreign Secretary, who would have been Prime Minister, too, but for his scrupulous adherence to the punctilio of political loyalty. When Austen's studies in Paris and Berlin were nearing completion, a constituency must be found for him. Adopted as the Unionist Candidate for the Border Burghs, he had gone off four years before this to make his appearance at Hawick. The father's suspense is soon relieved by the reports from over the Cheviots that the debut is of undoubtable excellence; whereupon he writes of the candidate, then aged twenty-four—the words have been quoted in an earlier connection but must be given again here, so much meant this episode to the father—:

April 1888.—He is so attractive, so frank, and so intelligent that he is always a favourite wherever he goes. . . . I begin to think he will cut me out entirely, and I am very proud of him.

But there would be no chance on the Border before a General Election. Several years of waiting seemed long to the Radical Unionist leader. When his sense of the loss of former companions was bleakest, more and more must he have longed to have his son by his side in the House of Commons. Early in 1892¹ a seat in the Birmingham neighbourhood, East Worcestershire, became vacant when the former member, Hastings, was expelled from the House² after trial and conviction for breach of trust. Invited to stand as Liberal Unionist candidate, Austen was released by his Hawick supporters.

¹ March 21, 1892.

² *Annual Register*, 1892, p. 17 (March 21).

Some Worcester true-blues kicked. Highbury's heresy on dis-establishment they could not bear; they stipulated for conformity to Conservative views on the question of the Church. When the young man flatly refused to give the pledges demanded, they threatened to run their own nominee. The Liberal Unionist candidate pointed out that to bargain his known convictions for votes would be not more wrong than stupid. For a few weeks, the local dispute threatened to take a grave turn and to become a national matter; for involved in the affair was a formidable parent and he was roused to go all lengths. Arthur Balfour and other Conservative leaders expostulated with their local stalwarts. This mediation cleared the air. Henceforward, up to the General Election of 1892 and through it, in the Midlands generally, as in Birmingham itself, the two Unionist wings worked together. On March 30, 1892, Austen Chamberlain was returned unopposed as member for East Worcestershire. Congratulated by a few magnanimous Liberals, Harcourt foremost among them, while he waited on the cross-bench, the new member then walked up the floor between his father Joseph and his uncle Richard. This association in the House was a source of lasting happiness to the best-hated man.

CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56.

VI

As spring turned to summer, this Parliament felt moribund. Members, convinced that dissolution was proximate, could not think seriously of anything but their constituencies. In various odd ways the House of Commons showed signs of debility and inconsequence. Contrary to custom, and to its own surprise, it voted to sit on Derby Day—and did not sit. On the date of the holiday so democratically renounced there were not members enough to make a House. The Government was already satisfied that the difficult attempt to keep its followers together could not be prolonged. No whipping availed against apathy. Most Parliaments prolonged nigh to their limit end in this fashion.

The date of dissolution had to be decided one way or the other. For this purpose the leaders of both Unionist parties met at Devonshire House on May 25. The Whips of both wings were present and stated their view. This council was typical of the

BOOK
X.
1892.

private scenes which from time to time settle the course of our constitutional life. The local agents in the lump favoured dissolution in June. They protested in familiar terms that "steam could not be kept up much longer", and that seasonal advantages would accrue to the Unionists. Some thought a majority possible. The Prime Minister, the Leader of the House and the Whig Duke concurred with the Whips, that there was neither life enough nor sufficient conviction to carry the Irish Local Government Bill through Committee. The wish coincided with the thought, and the judgment was sound. The Conservatives knew their own men.

Chamberlain resisted. As we know, he wanted the Irish Bill placed on the Statute-book as an earnest of good faith in the eyes of British electors, whether Irish Nationalists liked it or not. He argued that the Unionist cause was now gaining every day; that the recent by-elections had stemmed the Gladstonian advance; that the coming Ulster Convention would give a powerful impetus in the Unionist direction, were more time allowed for its effect to tell; and that too many Unionists would be on holiday in mid-summer.

His record ¹ of this discussion is a document unique of its kind as showing how dissolutions are brought about and how parties are "managed":

Wednesday, May 25, 1892.—Meeting at Devonshire House.—Devonshire, Salisbury, Balfour, Wolmer, A. Douglas and Middleton to discuss date of dissolution.

I opposed June for following reasons. After division and majority of 92 on Local Government Bill we ought at least to try and forward Bill in Committee. Otherwise, it would be said that Government had only introduced it as an electioneering measure. The tide was rising in our favour in the country and the improvement likely to continue.

Parnellite and Gladstonian divisions were distracting their counsels and disgusting the country. The Ulster Convention would have great influence and its effect would increase during next few months.

Bad trade was causing the Trades Unionists to become more independent of their leaders.

The shopkeepers and others begin to take holidays at the end of June.

¹ Chamberlain's Occasional Diary.

The effect of strikes in the North has not worn off and will be prejudicial. The fishermen will be all at sea. The London shopkeepers will be furious at the interference with the season.

CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56.

On the other hand, it was urged by Middleton and Wolmer that although the tide was setting just now in our favour, it might ebb at any moment—that there is always risk of trouble at the end of session, when the members cannot be brought to attend regularly—that it would be impossible to carry the Local Government Bill if even half a dozen Gladstonians or Irish obstructed it.

That Ulster would be forgotten in a few months—that the shopkeepers' holiday does not begin till July—that although the strike in the North might be over, more important ones were threatened in the Midlands and the Metropolis—that the fishermen would be away for herring fishing in the autumn—and lastly, that the vast majority of the local agents were in favour of June and said that "steam could not be kept up much longer".—A later election would also interfere with registration, and would rouse a clamour at our taking the elections at almost the last moment before the new Register.

Balfour said he thought it impossible to carry on business in the House and that their men would not stay for the Local Government Bill.

The meeting was therefore unanimously against my view—Lord Salisbury reluctantly agreeing on the ground of parliamentary difficulties.

Middleton said he thought it *possible* that Unionists might have a majority on a June or July election.

Though thus in a minority of one regarding the manner in which the dissolution of the Unionist Parliament of 1886–92 was arranged, Chamberlain never altered his view of it as a campaigning proposition. He held that had the elections been postponed until September, the Unionists might easily have won twenty more seats. In that case, Mr. Gladstone could not have formed his fourth Government. There would have been a deadlock. Upon what might then have happened it is curious to speculate. There might have had to be what is called in our day a constitutional conference. The course of national and Imperial events, and Chamberlain's career, might have been widely altered.¹ For considered meditations of this kind no leisure was

¹ "Lord Salisbury saw Mr. Chamberlain last night who is a shrewd political observer. He said he had never known an occasion when the future was so impenetrable. Any kind of surprise in any direction was on the

BOOK
X.
1892.

left. Next day, May 26, it was known on all sides that the General Election, though not yet formally announced, must come in a few weeks.

VII

The Radical Unionist was the first statesman to open the electoral campaign. Probably in this contest—and it was in fact, as events proved, the decisive battle on Gladstonian Home Rule as proposed six years before—Chamberlain was at the very top of his fighting powers in the country. He threw himself into the struggle like an unloosed hurricane of pent-up energy. His vigour was beyond emulation by any leader of four-score and three or so, no matter how wonderful for that length of existence. In the next weeks Chamberlain at fifty-six was the life and soul of the Unionist effort. This partly by personal exertion in the Midlands, partly by the effect of his word and example throughout the country. Never did he make so many speeches in the same number of weeks; and never did he sustain a succession of speeches with more vibrating energy. Whether any other popular leader has surpassed that feat of incessant vigour may be doubted. He seemed as fresh at the end as at the beginning. Part of the secret, no doubt, was thorough preparation. As in 1885, he had thought out in advance his sequence of speeches much as able writers may plan a series of articles.

From early in June, at the outset of his operations, he had fixed on two main lines of argument. First, the Ulster question and the appeal to Nonconformists. Second, the social question and the appeal to the working classes.

Both questions contributed heavily to frustrate Liberal hopes.

Here we come to an episode little known but of far-reaching import, as time showed. In the north of Ireland the Unionists—Protestants now, political as religious, in the full historic sense of that word—were about to hold at Belfast the most massive and impressive demonstration of its kind ever organised in these islands. Chamberlain was deep in the Ulster movement. For six years he had been in close touch with leading Liberal Unionists in Ulster, like Sinclair, Andrews, McGeagh. He might possibly

cards" (Lord Salisbury to Queen Vic-
toria, June 3, 1892). *Letters of Queen*

Victoria, Third Series, vol. ii. p.
123.

have been sceptical about the talk of resistance, had it come from the Orangemen alone, though he surmised even of these that it was no mere affair with them of big drums and braggadocio—that at the last they would take up arms rather than yield. Still, his conjectures about the fibre of the Orangemen might have left him unsure. But when men of standing and weight who had been real Liberals in Ulster before Gladstone's plunge—when these respectable and worthy-looking citizens explained quietly that they would stake their possessions and their existence against the proposition of control by a Dublin Parliament, then Chamberlain came to the definite and sound conclusion that this was no affair of political melodrama and that any attempt to enforce Home Rule on Ulster would mean war. He was convinced that Gladstone's policy would break on this rock if by hap it escaped all other dangers. The Radical Unionist was incomparably better informed about Protestant Ulster than were the Liberal leaders. He was well served by his curiosity about practical detail. He sent over his own agents to enquire. Their reports brought out one fact. The Ulster movement was a democratic movement. There, the deeper you went down amongst the Protestant masses the starker was the spirit.

More serried than in 1886 was the new uprising. Early in 1892 the possibility of a Liberal majority and of another Home Rule Bill was in sight. Surreptitiously but seriously Ulster was arming. From respectable persons who spoke soberly Chamberlain received astonishing visits. Amongst those who called on him was Macknight, the well-known biographer of Burke and editor of the *Northern Whig*—by no means an illiberal or unthoughtful person:

Macknight called to give account of the proposed Ulster Convention, which he says will be the largest and most important demonstration ever held in Ulster. He said that from the first he had warned Mr. G. that Ulster would fight rather than submit to be governed by the Nationalists. The strongest opponents of Mr. G.'s policy were the Liberals who had followed him loyally up to 1885. Macknight said that in 1886 a private meeting of leaders was held which actually arranged a plan of resistance and settled the places which were to be held against the Nationalists by Ulster Volunteers. He had it positively on authority which he was able

BOOK

X.

1892.

to trust that arms had already been provided and stored. Lord Dufferin had told him that he would come home and place himself at the head of the Protestants if the Bill were passed. The most influential, most wealthy and most solid citizens were heartily with the movement for resistance, and the Gladstonians were in a fool's paradise if they believed that the demonstrations expressed only empty brag.¹

In recognising the full gravity of these communications the Radical Unionist was right, and the Gladstonians were stone-blind. The political uprising of Ulster in 1892 was in fact a mighty matter by comparison with 1886. First, an appeal signed by six thousand ministers of the Nonconformist churches in Ireland was sent to every Nonconformist minister in Great Britain. Next, the colossal symbolism of the great Convention was displayed in Belfast on June 17. In the strict sense of words, it was an ominous and portentous pageant. For the purpose a special building had been erected. It was crowded nigh to suffocation by nearly 12,000 persons. They were not merely so many individuals. They were delegates appointed at public meetings in every division of the province. Sinclair, who had been as sound a Liberal as any in Great Britain, said of Gladstone's too simple proposition of a Dublin Parliament: "If it be ever set up we shall ignore its existence. Its acts will be but as waste-paper; its police will find our barracks pre-occupied with our constabulary; its judges will sit in empty court-houses. The early efforts of its executive will be spent in devising means to deal with a passive resistance to its taxation coextensive with loyalist Ulster." The chairman, the Duke of Abercorn, was no Demosthenes, but no orator could have created greater emotion than he by his closing cry: "*Men of the North, once more I say we will not have Home Rule*".

The magnitude and intensity of this demonstration, its spectacle of fanatical vehemence and wild enthusiasm compressed by rigid order and discipline, had an enormous effect upon wavering minds in Great Britain, where so many electors of Liberal inclination were repelled by the squalor of Nationalist anarchy after Parnell's fall and death. That Home Rule might in fact mean civil war in Ireland—that the idea could not be

¹ Chamberlain's Occasional Diary, Thursday, May 12, 1892.

dismissed as a melodramatic myth—this truth became an anxiety to numbers of British electors who had hitherto regarded the suggestion of civil war in the British islands as beyond the bounds of belief in modern times.

CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56.

Gladstone denounced the idea of an "Ulster rebellion" as an enormity worthy of "fools or rogues" with whom the law of the land had always been competent to deal. He denied that he meant to describe the Unionist population of Northern Ireland as "fools or rogues" in the lump; he admitted the idea of some sort of exceptional treatment for some small portion of the territory in debate. This was blindness to Irish realities. Almost incredible to say, the fierce truth of the Ulster difficulty never was realised by Gladstone or by any one of his colleagues. Most of his followers declared joyously that the "Orange" threat was bombast and farce.

Chamberlain, on the contrary, painted the devil on the wall. He maintained with disturbing insistence in the constituencies that peril of civil war in Ireland was the sternest of facts; that the northern Protestants rather than submit to the rule of a Dublin Parliament would keep their vows; would organise resistance by every means; and in the last resort would take up arms and fight to the end.

From the mid-spring of 1886, Chamberlain's detailed information from Ulster, and especially from its former Liberals, convinced him that should the United Kingdom ever be ruptured at all, separate treatment would have to be extended to Northern Ireland. What history has said and has settled about that part of the argument requires no emphasis here. Chamberlain's attacks on the squabbling Nationalists were ruthless electioneering stuff. Gladstonian parody of Unionist Ulster and its claims was not successful in Great Britain.

VIII

At still more advantage was our complete campaigner on social questions. Day after day he addressed, in language they thoroughly understood, the British masses, and especially the Trades Unionists. Every trenchant syllable went home. Could they not see that their claims foremost in justice had been

BOOK

X.

1892.

too long thrust aside by Gladstone's monomania? Pointing to what the Unionist alliance had already reaped, he maintained that further substantial harvesting was more required than constitutional change. "Mending the machine" was a false cry. The machine as it was could be operated with full power for the good of the people. In different speeches he dwelt on five proposals—another "unauthorised programme". District and parish councils to complete a democratic system of local self-government; courts of arbitration to supersede the barbarism of strikes; effective workmen's compensation for accidents (and this crying cause he knew how to plead in a way that went straight home to the hearts and minds of all the working-classes); a measure enabling workmen to become owners of their dwellings; and old-age pensions. He kept up a stirring appeal for that latter ideal, though never disguising that the beginnings must be voluntary and modest. All these things he asserted might be obtained in the next Parliament were an adequate Unionist majority returned, and could not be obtained otherwise.

In popular eyes he had altogether the better of it again on a different issue. He, the Unionist, declared for the shortening by statute of the hours of labour for miners, and in other exceptionally dangerous or arduous occupations; and for the reduction of excessive hours as in the case of shop assistants. But on the very eve of the Ulster Convention, Mr. Gladstone, having first refused to receive a deputation from the London Trades Council on the Eight Hours question, did receive them only to declare that the claims of Ireland upon his time and powers forbade him to adopt this labour movement or to encourage it in any way. He not only said that nothing would induce him to "excite any expectations", but he refrained from the slightest expression of sympathy. In truth he disapproved statutory limitation of the hours of adult labour, and exerted all his dialectical genius to confound his democratic visitors. This contrast between Gladstone and Chamberlain filled the younger progressives with despair and played its part in thwarting Home Rule hopes.

In the middle of the struggle, however, a contrary factor made itself felt. Very gently and earnestly Lord Salisbury entreated the Radical Unionist to remember the susceptibilities of his allies

and not to suggest too strenuously that the Conservative party had become an agency for accomplishing his old Radical purposes: CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56.

SALISBURY TO CHAMBERLAIN

Private.—June 22, 1892.—I ought to have written to you myself—as I doubt not Wolmer did not, and could not, describe the particular corn in the Tory foot which I want you to spare. I can quite understand that you should describe our legislation as liberal, progressive, and so forth: and that you should be more indulgent to us in that respect than we deserve. But what I am afraid of are the references to 1885. To say that the Tories have supported measures whose liberalism you approve, will only be interpreted by them as showing that knowing them better you do them more justice. But if you say that they have given in on all the points on which you differed from them in 1885—you give them an uncomfortable feeling that they have deserted their colours and changed their coats. I do not think there is any ground for such a self-reproach—though I believe it is true that they have proved—and that you have found them—more liberal on many points than in 1885 you could have imagined. But if you wish to praise us on this head—as may be very expedient—do it *absolutely*, and without any unnecessary reference to the controversies of 1885. I dare say you will think the point a small one—but if I have made myself clear I shall not quarrel with that judgment.

Corns when you examine them in a microscope are very small things.

After that the Radical Unionist confined himself usually to tearing attacks on the Home Rule parties, especially in relation to Ulster.

The spirit of the General Election of 1892 has been fully explained for a reason. That test of the constituencies gave the death-blow to Gladstone's last crusade and established Chamberlain's power instead upon the new basis of democratic Imperialism.

IX

Almost up to this point the Gladstonians, encouraged by their agents, had counted on a majority of 100 or nearly. The Liberal Caucus, perhaps more exalted than ever in fervour, no longer possessed any animating and managing force approaching the concentrated grip and drive of its founder. Except in London

BOOK —and in Wales, where Home Rule was quite subordinate to
 X. disestablishment—the Liberals failed to gain half the seats they
 1892. expected and needed.

But while everywhere else they did gain somewhat, in Chamberlain's area they met overwhelming defeat. Their dearest desire, to overthrow him on his own ground, had been chastened of late; but some damage they looked to inflict. Instead, Chamberlain in the West division had a majority of over 4000, such as he had not known before, the largest in the city. Unionists swept all the contested divisions by immense majorities. Not only that. In neighbouring places—Walsall, Wednesbury, Wolverhampton—the Unionists wrested three more seats from the Gladstonians. At the end of the election in the counties of Warwick, Worcester and Stafford they held 30 seats out of 39.

Historically it must be noted that there is no parallel in British politics for the triumph of one man in his own area against the contrary current of the nation. One day far-off he would do it again, and in more extraordinary circumstances. If now he won to the height of his hope in the Midlands, he had worked for it like a corps of men. As evidence of how he surpassed himself in exertion we must note that in three weeks, without slackening for a moment the impact of his onslaughts, he made twenty speeches, all in the Midlands except one in Manchester at the Free Trade Hall.

The rejoicing of Birmingham was limitless at this issue of the six years' war. Liberals widely admired his social campaign—some of them, like Childers amongst the older men and Haldane amongst the younger, hoped even yet that he might come back some day—and confessed that he was the only statesman who had eminently enhanced his personal power in this General Election. By contrast Mr. Gladstone's majority in Midlothian fell pathetically low—from nearly 4000 at his last contest in 1885 to less than 700. John Morley in Newcastle lost his Liberal colleague, and by a freak of discomfiture was second on the poll to a Conservative Home Ruler of sorts whose eccentricity was odd enough to excite the gaiety of gods and fishes. In Leeds, Herbert Gladstone's majority was narrower than his father's; while in various other dense centres of population where Liberals won, their polls were smaller than they had anticipated and the

Conservatives' much higher. The striking and unexpected success of the Liberals was in London. Elsewhere their gains in the boroughs were small, and in the counties were not sweeping. All the evidences marked a considerable thing—the exhaustion of the Gladstonian legend as an electoral all.

CHAP.
XLIV.
ÆT. 56.

On the Radical Unionist conjunctions showered, his fellow-statesmen on that side wondering how he did it. Three messages may stand for many:

A. J. Balfour.—You do know how to manage things in Birmingham. I never saw such smashing results. I hope Austen is quite safe.¹ Isn't Newcastle amusing?

Sir Henry James.—Your splendid success in the Midlands and the great work you have done give you an enormous power and it will be mainly by the exercise of that power that Home Rule will be defeated. . . . The whole work with you has been magnificently carried on, and of nowhere else that I know can the same be said.

Randolph Churchill.—Your Midland campaign was prodigious, quite Napoleonic.

There was a disagreeable drop in the cup of the Liberal Unionist leader as in nearly all political cups though brimmed with success. His distinctive following in the House of Commons was reduced to 47. But yet the Liberal Unionists were not nearly wiped out, as had been so eagerly hoped and prophesied. Their numbers still were larger than the exiguous Home Rule majority full of jars and discords.

X

Well might Mr. Gladstone sigh, "Too small, too small". Ominous was one indication. In every distinctive group of the English constituencies—in the boroughs, in the counties, in London as well as in university representation—there was a majority against Home Rule, making an adverse English total of 71. Against this the nominal Liberal and Nationalist majority

¹ "Austen" was as safe as his father. Three months before, when he entered Parliament, he had been returned unopposed for East Worcestershire. Now, in his first electoral contest, he was about to be elected by a majority of 3600.

BOOK
X.
1892.

of 40 in the whole House derived from the Celtic fringes. It depended entirely on the Irish allies, broken amongst themselves and belittled by British opinion.

Was it not blankly plain that a Home Rule Bill certain to be thrown out by the House of Lords could not be carried against an unconverted England? Yielding to other forces no longer to be repressed, Home Rule was already a declining interest. Its lingering hold on Liberalism was only maintained by the gradually weakening powers of one octogenarian. The emotional magic of 1886 on the Home Rule side—the “vision splendid”—had faded “into the light of common day”.

The Gladstonian ranks had never been so full of trouble. Anti-Imperialist Liberals and Rosebery's Imperialist neophytes were at the beginning of their discords. Between anti-Parnellites and Parnellites was the bitterness of death. Keir Hardie, despite the sorry ridicule poured on his tweed cap, was an Independent Labour member and already the founder of a new party—but that it was destined to displace Liberalism some day hardly anyone imagined at the time. Disestablishers and local-optionists were no longer content to subordinate themselves to the Irish cause or each other. Personal grievances and feuds were about to aggravate the competitive claims of groups to priority for their measures.

On the other hand, the Unionist alliance had never been so solid and exultant. In Chamberlain's view the situation was perfect. The slender success of the Gladstonian cause would be the certain means of bringing it to catastrophe.

As the election telegrams poured in, Mr. Gladstone was staying at Dalmeny, where his host, Lord Rosebery, was full of boding instincts. Morley's letters were as full of dejection. Amidst these settling shadows it would have been well for everything and everyone had the saddened veteran been free to decline office and to retire with honour. But honour forbade freedom. After his part in bringing about Parnell's fall he felt bound to devote to the Irish cause all of strength that remained to him, and in his eighty-and-odd years to lead a forlorn hope with unquenchable valour. Until nearly the end, when infirmity of judgment no less than of bodily faculties overcame him, it was the noblest passage of his life, moving the hearts of all men,

friend and foe. An able worshipper wrote that "the majority for Mr. G." was "just big enough to make it necessary for Home Rule to be faced by him with the certainty, of course, that anything he proposes will be wrecked". To another sworn disciple who now became his devoted factotum Mr. Gladstone remarked, "You have attached yourself to a corpse". Mr. Gladstone's age, said Rosebery, "made the whole prospect a terrible tragedy".¹ Sir Henry Ponsonby reported to Her Majesty:

CHAP.
XLIV.
Æt. 56.

The Duke of Devonshire certainly did not think Mr. Gladstone could do the work of Prime Minister. But Mr. Chamberlain had said that the party would maintain him as Prime Minister as long as they could, for he was the figurehead which they all supported. But it was absurd to expect that he would be able to perform the duties of the office.²

After seven years' suspension of fate there was at hand the Nemesis of momentary omnipotence in 1886, of self-engrossed vision and irreparable precipitancy. The first Home Rule movement, at its outset a rushing current, was about to sink in the sands.

XI

The few weeks before the change of Government were full of rumour and movement. Chamberlain was not entirely content. He thought that, had his advice more completely prevailed, the Gladstone majority would have been still feebler or nil; and strongly he held that, Welsh Disestablishment being inevitable sooner or later, the Church ought to have compromised with it, making the best terms while there was time. Until then the Unionists could not look to make much impression on Wales, where they had just lost every seat but two.

He had some strange visitors. One of them thought that on terms Redmond's Parnellite group, numbering nine, might act with the Unionists. Another eccentric well known in his day as a patriotic Socialist suggested that Highbury might win the support of some, already working for the rise of an Independent Labour party, who on the whole disliked Liberals more than Tories. On the Liberal side there were some flurried whispers of

¹ These phrases from the *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*.

² *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. ii. p. 129 (July 17, 1892).

BOOK

X.

1892.

compromise with the Radical secession. Some thoughtful men, as we have seen, still conjectured that Chamberlain, in view of his wide social views and his unabashed sentiments on the principle of disestablishment, might come back to his old party. The *Daily News*, however, declared that Chamberlain must be crushed. "Easier said than done", as he had often remarked during the last few years. He could not be crushed, and never now could he be won back.

Lord Salisbury's Government was justified in meeting Parliament to test the cohesion of the new majority and draw its declarations. On August 7, in a packed House, "young Asquith", as still he sometimes was called, moved the vote of want of confidence—his speech a compact masterpiece, only criticised on the score that he had spoken at twenty-two as well as he spoke now at forty. He was always to speak on a high plane of excellence, much in the same style, both classical and efficient. Asquith himself had lately pressed inconveniently for "details" of the new Home Rule scheme. When the aged leader rose, his ample eloquence conveyed nothing except that the Irish Question was his last link with public life and that the Peers must consider well whether it might not be their last link with Parliament. At this point, though the summer afternoon had been bright, the skies without clouded for thunder and enveloped the House of Commons in darkness until artificial light was shed from the glass roof. Members of Parliament are as susceptible as members of the Stock Exchange, but both sides could read the omens as they wished. Interest flagged until, two days after, Chamberlain resumed the debate.

In view of the imminence of a division involving a change of Government, the House was more crowded than at any time since the excitement of 1886. Again chairs were seen on the floor, members filled the galleries, sat on the steps of the gangways; pressed round the Speaker's Chair at one end, and at the other thronged the bar.¹ He had not known a greater parliamentary audience. Some hearers and witnesses were of opinion that he surpassed his performance in the February before, and never yet had addressed the House with equal effect.

In opening he found a scalding sentence for his inveterate

¹ Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Home Rule Parliament, 1892-95*, p. 130.

enemy Mr. Healy, who had tried to balk and delay his intervention. "Whenever it is desired to exhibit personal discourtesy towards any man"—he paused a moment and then dropped every separate syllable as if by after-thought—"or any woman, the hon. and learned gentleman always presents himself to accomplish it." Owing to some recent circumstances this merciless stab became the talk of two nations. Then for an hour he kept the House in excitement or laughter with intervals of hushed tension, and played on every mood. The Opposition, he charged, had tried to stifle every awkward enquiry. They were going into office without one word of explanation as to what they would do when they got there. When their policy was known, what would become of their majority of forty? After a few days, five or six months would elapse before the House met again. What was to happen in the recess? Was Egypt to be abandoned according to Mr. John Morley, or retained according to Lord Rosebery? No longer would the British democracy be found in favour of "a policy of scuttle". How were the Welsh disestablishers and the new Labour group to adjust their jarring claims to precedence? Knowing already that Labouchere would not be included in the next Cabinet—that the personal hopes of another enemy were about to be dashed—he asked in velvet tones how the interests of the Cabinet were to be reconciled with the interests of *Truth*.

What sort of a Home Rule was the next Bill to mean? He then furnished the House with a neat collection of extracts to show that the whole array of Liberal leaders had repudiated the demands made by Parnell's successor, John Redmond,¹ whose group had it in their power at any moment to reduce Mr. Gladstone's nominal majority from 40 to 20 or so. "How long are you going to allow ducks and drakes to be made by the Irish party of all your British legislation? . . . At least I can ask the wisest and most sensible among you to reconsider the position. What was at all times supremely difficult has now become, in the present circumstances, impossible."²

The Leader of the House commented to the Queen upon this "most brilliant speech by Mr. Chamberlain". It "produced a great effect, but no attempt was made to reply to it. A stolid

CHAP.
XLIV.
ÆT. 56.

¹ John Redmond, speaking earlier, had put the Irish claim very high.

² Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. vii, (August 11, 1892).

BOOK X.
1892. silence was preserved on the Opposition side of the House, scarcely broken by the maiden efforts of one or two members of Parliament."¹

This speech, another of his expert "lessons in anatomy", received with rapture on the Unionist side and defiance on the other, foreshadowed the line and the temper of the struggle for the next two years. Chamberlain, with all his technical supremacy, had this drawback, that he consolidated his opponents on these occasions nearly as much as he kindled his own party. Listening to him, Unionist members felt doubly certain of the future. The Gladstonians felt less certain of it; but for all that he roused them to a stiffer spirit. The many-striped sections of the Opposition closed up, and just before midnight the Home Rulers carried their no-confidence vote, by their full 40 in the largest division ever known.² Six hundred and sixty members voted out of 670.

Not only friends expressed their admiration of Chamberlain's great parliamentary effort on the night when the Government was turned out. An advanced Liberal, W. T. Stead, who loved him not, remarked:

Mr. Chamberlain, whose speech was one of the most incisive and effective ever delivered in parliament, set forth, with extraordinary lucidity and force, the fixed determination of the mass of the British people never under any pressure whatever to concede to Ireland the full measure of colonial independence.³

XII

Singular to say in our time, when we know much better than he did himself how irrevocably his lot was decided, speculation about his political future was still busy and conflicting. The plainest of characters as a combatant, he seemed at the same time an enigmatical statesman with his implacable resistance to disruptive Home Rule and yet with his incorrigible social schemes and dreams.

What would be the end of him after all? The question just

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. ii. p. 139.

² *Review of Reviews*, September 1892.

³ Against the Government 350
For the Government . 310

Majority . 40

then was discussed by curious coincidence at the same time from opposite standpoints. Sir Algernon West, the best diarist of these times, records the ideas of one of the new Liberals who afterwards rose to eminence in the State: CHAP.
XLIV.
ÆT. 56.

August 6.— . . . Haldane told me of a long conversation he had had lately with Chamberlain, who clearly was looking forward to leading the Liberals. Said his position in keeping a Tory Government in was very different from that of supporting them when out. He should support all social reforms which were not for party advantage.¹

The same subject was considered with more discernment at Osborne when Lord Salisbury was there just before he ceased to be Prime Minister. The Queen notes in her journal:

August 3.— . . . Talked of what Mr. Chamberlain would do if Mr. Gladstone were no longer leader. We agreed he was hardly likely to go back to the Home Rulers, and might possibly join the Unionists. Of course there would be difficulties, on the questions on which he holds very decided opinions, and they would have to be kept open.²

This last was the shrewder conjecture as the situation stood when in the constituencies the General Election had been decided by a hair's-breadth. But who knows? As for matters of personal ambition, he wrote to a friend, "The future is a blank to me politically".³ Had the Unionists held just twenty seats more, had the constitutional deadlock occurred, Gladstone would not again have been Prime Minister, the second Home Rule Bill would not have been introduced, social questions would have become dominant years before they did; and Chamberlain, victorious on the great constitutional issue, which had forced him into secession, might have become after all leader of a more advanced Liberalism putting compensation for accidents, old-age pensions and other forms of social insurance in the front of his domestic programme; while raising the Imperialism of Rosebery's school to a higher power.

¹ *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, p. 45. Series, vol. ii. p. 134.

³ Chamberlain to Bunce, August

² *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third 23, 1892.

CHAPTER XLV

THE SECOND HOME RULE BILL—AFTER SEVEN YEARS—THE ANTI-CLIMAX

(1893)

MR. GLADSTONE'S last Administration—Another Cabinet of Discords—Chamberlain's Ascendancy—1893—A Tropical Session—The Struggle on the Second Home Rule Bill—A Deadly Opponent—Hatred explodes—Strong Passions and a Weak Chairman—The Scuffle on the Floor—Exaggeration and Fact—The Peers throw out the Bill—Ministers shun Dissolution—The Peers and Parish Councils—A Last Liberal Hope—Chamberlain's Counter-Move—The Adventure in the Bahamas.

I

BOOK X.
1893. MOVING about the country this autumn, Sir Henry James sends Highbury the gossip from the great houses and foreshadows the coming parliamentary temper:

Twenty-eight young men have formed themselves into a Sacred Band—never to leave the House, always dining at the St. Stephen's Club—to sit together—vociferously to cheer every Unionist—and to object to the views of every Gladstonian. We ought to offer them some recruits. I wish we could be received at the St. Stephen's Club as Honorary Members.¹

A few months later, before the opening of Parliament for 1893, the same correspondent sends him the news from the other side of politics:

"Loulou" [Harcourt] has been staying with me for a couple of days. He says they anticipate a permanent return to Malwood in June. I replied—that will not be. If you go out there will be a General Election. "No," he said, "we shall offer to support you." Last night I saw N.

¹ September 26, 1892.

Rothschild. He says Harcourt is riding for a fall before the Home Rule Bill comes on for a second reading. R. says that there is great jealousy between W. V. H. and Rosebery and neither will serve under the other.¹

CHAP.
XLV.
Æt. 57.

The Radical Unionist signals gaily to the leader of the Opposition:

Rumour has it that Mr. J. S. Balfour is at Buenos Ayres and Mr. A. J. Balfour at Nice. But I have found the newspapers so incorrectly informed about the movements of public men that it would not surprise me to learn that *you* were at Buenos Ayres studying the silver question, and Mr. J. S. Balfour at Nice or Monaco utilising his experience as a director to form a new bank. In any case it is important that I should see you before the meeting of Parliament. What are your movements?²

A short digression upon the inwardness of a strange Ministerial situation is necessary to explain Chamberlain's famous part in the pending grapple.

In the autumn he had remarked grimly to Dilke, "We shall have some fun next year".

On August 15, 1892, Gladstone kissed hands for the fourth time, and by Nature's veto for the last. The Ministers designate crossed the Solent under the shadow of a brooding storm and recrossed amidst incessant lightning and pealing thunder. The new Cabinet was somewhat conventional, yet as discordant as that of 1880. Mr. Burt, an admirable working-class member, was not included, nor the new Labour movement recognised in any way.³ Gladstone ignored these things, though to encourage them was his only chance. Lord Rosebery, after serious demur, became Foreign Secretary on unusual terms, expressing views more acceptable to Salisbury and Chamberlain than to his chief or to colleagues like Harcourt and Morley. Labouchere suffered the displeasure of the Crown, reinforced by the antagonism of Rosebery and Chamberlain alike—though up

¹ January 17, 1893.

² January 13, 1893.—Jabez Spencer Balfour, formerly a somewhat prominent Liberal M.P., was subsequently apprehended and tried for fraud in connection with the Liberator Building Society and other companies. He was sentenced to fourteen years' penal servitude.

³ Chamberlain wrote to Dilke on April 21, 1893: "Mr. Gladstone has no real sympathy with the working classes—and a perfect hatred of all forms of Socialism. His concessions are extorted from him and are the price paid for votes, and therefore I do not wonder at the pressure put upon him."

BOOK
X.
1893.

to a few weeks before his inclusion had been thought certain by all the outsiders. Dilke could not be considered, though returned by a large majority for the Forest of Dean.

II

After the change of Government the new House of Commons did not meet for more than five months. In the interval the new Cabinet was in jeopardy. Rosebery must have his way about the whole length of the Nile region from the equatorial lakes to the Mediterranean—from Uganda to Egypt. Mr. Gladstone said to Harcourt "that they might as well ask him to put a torch to Westminster Abbey as to send more troops to Egypt";¹ but he sent them as Cromer required when the new Khedive Abbas Hilmi gave trouble. Harcourt swore he would "die a thousand deaths" rather than consent to the annexation of Uganda, but, still swearing, he consented. At various times John Morley threatened to go out on Uganda and Egypt. Only for the sake of Home Rule did Gladstone on both issues restrain his own abhorrence of his Foreign Secretary's policy.² But his Chancellor of the Exchequer "really hates Home Rule".³ Harcourt and other Ministers demand from the Prime Minister more frequent Cabinets and more consultation otherwise. The autocracy of 1886 was repudiated. Unwillingly Mr. Gladstone had to conform. It is hardly exaggerated to say that his last Cabinet was his Calvary.

These clashes on principle were aggravated by personal jars. Morley, agreeing with Harcourt on the principles of Imperial and foreign policy, was revolted by his attitude on the Irish Question, and by his irascible manners. His outbreaks sometimes made attendance at the same Cabinet almost insupportable, big-hearted as was the Chancellor by nature. Rosebery's adherents steadily enhanced the influence Gladstone deplored.

¹ *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, p. 123.

² See also *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. ii. p. 242. Not to interrupt the main narrative later we may note by anticipation here that Chamberlain in the Uganda debate spoke against the Radicals, who were already denouncing the Foreign Secre-

tary as a "high priest of jingoism". Rosebery wrote to the Queen: "22nd March 1893.— . . . The discussion on Uganda went off very well on Monday, and was distinguished chiefly by the powerful and eloquent speech of Mr. Chamberlain."

³ *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, p. 83.

In the middle of December, Morley protested that he had never gone through such a terrible time as at Hawarden: "Mr. Gladstone was almost out of his mind about Uganda. . . . He was really like King Lear."¹ A couple of days later Morley was "very low and unhappy, and said there never was a Government as insincere; they none of them cared for Home Rule but he, Asquith and Mr. Gladstone".² Next day Morley said of himself:

CHAP.
XLV.
Æt. 57.

when he undertook his thankless office that he did not think, and we did not think, in our talks at Biarritz, that it would be as bad as it was; that Mr. Gladstone was getting old and could not last; that then, with Rosebery Prime Minister and Sir William Harcourt leader in the House of Commons, there would be the spectacle of a Home Rule Government with neither leader keen about it.³

Chamberlain prevailed and Gladstone disappeared. His Irish policy was swept away. As a personal drama the extraordinary struggle of 1893 stands alone. Disfigured by passion, but charged with the gravest national motives—raised to the height of merciless combat and sovereign pathos—exhibiting above all the contest, sustained for months, of matched and contrasting powers—the spectacle sometimes held men breathless, and sometimes released the furies. No struggle in parliamentary annals has been more livingly described. None the less, it has been too much depicted in what the critics of another age used to call the demoniac manner—as the case of an aged prophet baffled by a malign spirit. Gladstone and Chamberlain were indeed the great antagonists, nor have any two ever been more antithetical in every trait of figure and mind.

Otherwise the demoniac theory will not hold. From the beginning the old leader, in dealing with the human nature of both England and Ireland, had made profound errors. It was too late to retrieve them. From the beginning the new leader had staked his life upon defeating the policy of separate Parliaments, certain in the end to dislocate the United Kingdom whatever formulas to the contrary might be recited. His aim now was to destroy Home Rule if he could, and to clear it from the ground, leaving the field free again for other and, as he thought, greater affairs.

¹ *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, pp. 91, 92.

² *Ibid.* p. 93.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 91, 92 (December 18, 1892).

BOOK

X.

1893.

Almost on the eve of the great parliamentary conflict he addressed his son's constituents from East Worcestershire.¹ He declared that compromises possible in 1886 and just after would be madness now. Neither of the Irish parties could accept the practical maintenance of Imperial supremacy and Unionists must resist to the last.

III

A week later, at the end of January, Parliament met. The Queen's Speech showed that if the Peers threw out the Irish Bill there would be an attempt to carry Home Rule on the broader shoulders of the Newcastle programme. A long array of democratic measures was promised. Not one of them was big enough to offer any overpowering attraction to democracy. Against this kind of strategy the Unionists were certain to employ every safe resort of destruction and rejection, but yet would have to manage their plans with care. The new Parliament could not live very long—not more than two or three years. The next General Election must be kept in mind from the outset.

On February 13, 1893, Gladstone introduced his Second Home Rule Bill with oratorical command, with something of his former splendour of voice, and with more venerable majesty of aspect. Details of the Bill cannot engage us here. The novelty was the manner of dealing with the crux of Irish representation. This was the celebrated and ill-starred "In and Out" clause. The Irish members would be retained at Westminster, but would not vote on any matter touching Great Britain only. Indirectly they could influence anything and everything by their possible power, on issues entitling them to reappear, to overthrow a Cabinet and its whole policy, including the purely British part. It was a hopeless proposition.

Four days after, Chamberlain rose, and the duel began.² We must try to restore something of this scene. The Liberal Unionist leaders were no longer on the Front Bench in mutually irritating companionship with their rivals. They had been willing

¹ Birmingham, January 24, 1893.

² He had already made, on February 2, a masterful speech on the Ad-

dress, declaring for a firm Imperial policy in Egypt and Uganda.

this time to sit on the Opposition side if the Irish Nationalists would cross the floor and range themselves with the Ministerialists. This offer was declined. Thus the Liberal Unionist party of nearly fifty remained on the Government side but settled below the gangway. There, the Member for West Birmingham held the corner seat of the third bench, a position of eminent advantage. Fronting the Unionist tiers across the House, he addressed them direct as from a platform, with more effect than their own leaders could use, while he assailed Ministers obliquely or in full flank.

This singularity of positions drew all eyes to two antagonists, situated physically on the same side of the House, who fought to the death yet never could engage face to face. They contrasted now in every lineament and faculty. Gladstone's white head seemed larger than belongs to mortals—like those large faces of the gods that poets have supposed—and his eyes were deep and gleaming. With jet-black hair, Chamberlain was amongst the many commanding men who have had small heads, and his own looked smaller by comparison, while his eyes narrowed in combat instead of opening like Gladstone's. The voice of the one suggested harmony and grandeur; of the other, bright steel. The one had all the amplitudes of expression and gesture; the other in both had an unequalled economy, riveting attention so that every sentence had its impact and his hearers could not escape for a moment from his argumentative grip. The one was like the elements in movement; the other outwardly was all compression and suppression, yet his tones were saturated with incitement. Like no other two in the House both suggested abnormal energy, the one far more various, the other more concentrated.

Gladstone seemed an embodiment of age verging on the supernatural: Chamberlain looked like life in its prime, and as owning less than half the veteran's years, instead of two-thirds of them as was the fact. In this, fate had given him an advantage so marked that he almost seemed at blame for it. The Irish members looked across the floor at both. Even when Chamberlain was not speaking, they regarded his set countenance as an offence, his eyeglass and orchid as aggravations. The hatred of the Irish members rose to a madness in this session. Could wishes have extinguished him, he would have been annihilated.

BOOK

X.

1893.

On the last night (February 17) of the First Reading debate, Chamberlain began in a quiet key, and went on with rising power. He did not rail, but vivisected. From his standpoint, admitting the principle of giving Ireland the widest extension of local government consistent with the real preservation of a United Kingdom, he maintained that the Bill was destructive of both. Irishmen would necessarily endeavour, whenever an opportunity presented itself, to make an incomplete settlement complete according to their own conception. Where then would be Imperial unity? Might not Great Britain be engaged again, for instance, in a war for existence? Then the "Union of Hearts" would not help her much. Irish members, retained on the new terms, raising endless difficulties and embarrassments, would be continually "dangling about the lobby", never knowing when they might be called into the House.

The changes proposed, if once given, would be irrevocable:

I cannot understand the lightness with which some hon. members talk of withdrawing these concessions at a future time if the result should not answer their present expectation. I do not think they have considered the conditions. . . . It would be in a time of great excitement; it would be after a prolonged and bitter conflict between the Irish Parliament and the British Ministry; with Ireland at fever heat, perhaps in insurrection . . . with all the friends of Ireland and all the enemies of Great Britain throughout the world looking on. I say your task would be gigantic; I believe it might be impossible. . . . I say that never in the history of the world has a risk so tremendous been encountered with such a light-hearted indifference to its possible results.¹

His delivery was perfection. Unionist opinion declared the speech was "in all ways the most masterly" of the debate. Many Liberals agreed that he had far exceeded all his former efforts in the House and attained a new stature. The Queen thought it "splendid".²

IV

The Second Reading was proposed in Easter week (Thursday, April 6), when Mr. Gladstone, still holding up Austria-Hungary and Sweden-Norway as reassuring models, devoted ironical

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. viii. (February 17, 1893).

² *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. ii. p. 227.

attention to the warnings and prophecies of the Member for West Birmingham.

CHAP.

XLV.

ÆT. 57.

Chamberlain replied with full resources (Monday, April 10). He was interrupted by a pathetic incident. "You put all the blame on Parnell because he is dead", cried Willie Redmond to Gladstone. Chamberlain was gentle to that memory but, except for that, his whole speech was an attack of unrelaxing power—the strongest in argumentative substance of all his speeches against the Second Home Rule Bill. He gave his specific reasons for disbelieving and denying that the Bill, if passed, would create a "Union of Hearts" or contained the elements of finality. The financial provisions would be unfair to Great Britain in time of peace and still more unfavourable in case of war. The closing passages were the finest he ever delivered in direct contest with Mr. Gladstone:

It is not I who am attributing to the Irish people a double dose of original sin, but it is my right hon. friend who insists on . . . gifting the Irish people with a double dose of what I must call very original virtue. . . . I admire the almost boundless faith my right hon. friend has in the Irish leaders. He tells us in these conditions that for the defence of the property and the lives of the loyal population we are to trust to their good intentions; that for assistance in time of dire necessity we are to trust to their gratitude; that we are, in the words of Vivien, to

Trust them all in all, or not at all.

Yes, but in the poem we learn that the great enchanter, when he yielded to the temptress, brought about his own annihilation. We are asked to stake the dignity, the influence, the honour and the life of the nation upon this cast. . . . We are to do it on the assurance my right hon. friend gives us that a miracle will be wrought in our favour to change the hearts of men and alter the springs of human action.¹

He was again at his best. Members had become accustomed to say that he was always at his best. When survivors of his generation were questioned by the present writer, none of them could bring themselves to express a decided preference for any single speech of his above other efforts. Upon the debating powers he had attained Gladstone himself next day remarked in his letter to Her Majesty:

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. x. (April 10, 1893).

BOOK

X.

1893.

Mr. Chamberlain delivered a lengthened and an able speech. He [Gladstone] may or may not be an impartial judge of the relative powers of opponents; but to him it appears unquestionable both that Mr. Chamberlain has developed very remarkable debating faculties since he quitted the bulk of the Liberal party in 1886, and that in the present controversy he has stood very decidedly first in ability among the opponents of the present Bill in the House of Commons.¹

His opponents found their satisfaction. He was now exposed to a test that must have broken a man of less nerve but only hardened his. Day after day his worst enemy was the pretended ghost of his former self. A corps of resurrection men exhumed his old words, digging down to his earliest Birmingham speeches. Day after day he was met with startling passages of apparent self-contradiction. Extracts, often detached from the context with malicious cleverness, were intoned in every accent of indignation or parody, until even the Conservative benches sometimes shook with mirth. There was much deliberate misrepresentation in all this, as we already know, but also much that was cutting and damaging for the moment.

He had changed his secondary positions to fulfil his main conviction; he saw many things either in a new light or in different proportion. As we noticed in an earlier chapter, Burke and others had passed through a like ordeal Chamberlain took it like a strong man. Had he fumbled with continual expostulation and explanation he would have been lost. Trying to fight him now as he fought them, his opponents were not the vipers of the fable, but their teeth served them no better, for they bit on the file. His endurance of assault was imperturbable; and then came his counter-strokes. Far from allowing the edge of his own attack to be blunted by apology, he was always equipped with counter-quotations to show the past and present inconsistencies amongst themselves of the Home Rule sections and leaders, British and Irish.

V

A charming incident redeemed this terrible struggle—it was no less—before it came rapidly to the worst. Something like

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. ii. pp. 248, 249.

personal sympathy springs up between these two in spite of irreconcilable antagonism in politics. When Gladstone illustrated the infinite variety of his parliamentary genius in the debate on bimetallism, the Radical Unionist had been lost in admiration.

CHAP.
XLV.
Æt. 57.

Now he was to feel the touch of the enchanter in a way he never forgot. In the Second Reading debate, Mr. Austen Chamberlain rose about a week after his father's surpassing achievement. No circumstances could be conceived more trying for a young man with a maiden speech on his mind. Bearing himself well in every way, he spoke with clearness and point—and he had an eyeglass. The House thought him almost a replica. There was much congratulation of parent and heir. The Prime Minister had given a kindly cheer, but several days after (April 21), when winding up the debate, he returned to the topic. Turning like a prince of courtesy to his deadly foe, he said that the maiden speech of the Member for East Worcestershire “must have been dear and refreshing to a father's heart”. Bowing low at this, Chamberlain was more moved in the sight of the House than ever before or after.¹

VI

After twelve days' debate, the Second Reading was carried on April 21, by 347 votes to 304. In the interval before the next parliamentary developments of the struggle, the City of London demonstrated on the 3rd of May. Members of the Stock Exchange marched in formation, and burnt the Bill in front of the Guildhall, where Chamberlain, the principal speaker, was hailed with shouts of excitement.

The Ministerial ranks were holding more firmly than he had expected. He braced himself accordingly for the crowning and sustained effort. The Bill went into Committee on May 8, not to emerge from that stage and the discussion on Report for nearly four months. We cannot track it and its pursuer through

¹ Mr. Gladstone had already reported to the Queen in equally generous words: “18th-19th April.— . . . A little later in the evening Mr. Austen Chamberlain, son of Mr. Chamberlain, took part for the first time in the debates of the House. He delivered one

of the best speeches which has been made against the Bill, and exhibited himself as a person of whom high political anticipations may reasonably be entertained” (*Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. ii. p. 249).

BOOK
X.
1893.

all the turns of these mazes. Chamberlain had every clause of the measure at his finger-ends, and it is at least agreed about him that no more acute or quicker expert in Committee was known. Accomplished as he was in general debate, he was still better, when it came to close quarters, at taking clause by clause separately and pulling each one to pieces. For that task he had an unrivalled equipment. Minute discrimination, no less than comprehensive view, was required by the nature of his long service in commerce. We have seen how in his first political struggle against the Education Bill of 1870 he fastened upon detail and excelled at once in the art of thrusting crowbars into crevices. Since then, for twenty years his mastery of all kinds of committee work had been developed by his exceptional activities as a municipal statesman; by his unique experience in creating and conducting political organisations; by his control for half a decade of a complicated department of State; and by his close attention for years as a member of the House of Commons to legislation and investigation.

Day after day and night after night through the hot summer saw him fresh in alertness, endless in objections, turning every opening to account in an instant; springing up on the spur to dissect a proposal or split up a composite argument; or to unravel with ready discrimination a tangle of amendments to amendments. The debates often flagged in his absence, but always took fire when he returned. In this way he now acquired his full ascendancy over the Unionist rank and file. Delighting in late hours, he was at his best after dinner any time from ten o'clock onwards, when his challenges awakened the passions of both sides and the House resounded with cheers and counter-cheers.

The salient episodes may be rapidly recalled. Chamberlain worked in Committee in 1893 as he had hoped to do in 1886. Seizing upon the weakest part of the Bill, his first manoeuvre was to propose that the earlier clauses should be postponed in order to deal at once with the "In and Out" clause concerning Irish representation. This was rejected as a matter of course, but he had given points and phrases to Unionists throughout the country. Some days later the House was dumbfounded by a moment's misunderstanding—when his unmistakable voice

was heard in incredible accents—"What the devil are you talking about?" It appeared that Chamberlain was only repeating the outrageous remark of an Irish member and calling the Chairman's attention.

CHAP.
XLV.
Æt. 57.

The opening clauses of the Bill made way inch by inch through weeks of debate and by majorities good in the circumstances. A parliamentary witness notes:

Anyone who closely watches the course of events in Committee knows that the real Leader of the Opposition, the life and soul of obstruction, is Mr. Chamberlain. It is he that sets the battle in array, sends out skirmishing parties, and is ever ready to lead an attack in person. The rank and file are already tired of a business that interferes with their social arrangements. . . . Needs must when Mr. Chamberlain drives. He sits there in constant attendance, relentless, implacable. . . .

It is only when Mr. Chamberlain steps into the arena and Mr. Gladstone swiftly turns to face him that benches fill, drooping heads are raised, eyes brighten, the Chamber resounds with cheers and counter-cheers, and the dry bones of the debate rattle into strenuous life.¹

This chronicler conjectures in May that the Radical Unionist will not be able to keep it up; but in June laments that "the Opposition led by Mr. Chamberlain is triumphing all along the line". While the Irish members were martyrs to silence, Gladstone with marvellous plenitude was the chief obstructive of his own Bill, next to Chamberlain. The Radical Unionist's obstruction was deliberate and looked beyond the immediate inch-by-inch contention to the purposes of a final strategy. The Prime Minister—though apt now to be exhausted after his longer efforts—displayed at the least hint a prodigious versatility in discourse; and his lambent moods, the spell of his reminiscences, his inexhaustible abundance of analogy and illustration, captivated the homage and reverence of Unionists who were inexorable enemies of his policy. Chamberlain—his usual comment being "The old man is splendid"—felt all the wonder of this living legend, but was unsoftened by the charm.

Two incidents were amusing. Chamberlain, in the sight of those whom he called the new Radicals, committed the public enormity of entertaining two duchesses to tea on the Terrace.

¹ Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Home Rule Parliament*, pp. 143 and 149.

BOOK
X.
1893.

Yet Home Rulers extolled particularly at that time such rare marquises and earls or other peers as remained of their persuasion; and would have rejoiced to have a duke. About the same time, the Irish parties broke into safe mutiny against the Government when Ministers ceded to the Opposition on a form of words. Chamberlain with solemn comedy had offered thanks to the Treasury Bench in order to infuriate the Nationalists. Unionists went into the Ministerial lobby for once to defend the Government from its followers.

Towards the end of June only four clauses had been passed out of nearly forty. At this rate next year would find the Bill still in the maze. Liberal opinion protested that the Government would die of ignominy unless it found the prompt courage to guillotine resistance and force the Bill through Committee before the end of July.

Accordingly at the end of June the majority decreed the closure. The guillotine was to fall on the Opposition every Thursday in July. Each week in that month a block of clauses was to be carried.

To put the Ministers in this dilemma was just what Chamberlain had purposed, knowing that it would do them more harm in the country than it could do them good in Parliament. For the next month the House of Commons was a sizzling cauldron of partisanship. Jests about the Place de la Grève, about tumbrils and sneezing in sawdust, diverted the lighter spirits without relieving the tension. With each weekly decapitation of Unionist argument, exasperation increased, until the Mother of Parliaments was disgraced before the world. Other irritants were aggravated by the tropical weather and the crowded state of the House. Goethe remarks that every large assembly, no matter what may be the individual ability of the persons composing it, is potentially a mob. Heavy divisions went on monotonously in an unparalleled sequence. Night after night over 600 members traversed the lobbies again and again.

VII

In a sultry temper Chamberlain assailed the imposition of "the gag". The Irish parties keeping their calculated silence,

he attacked for stifling British deliberations. Turning to them, he exclaimed, amidst hot cheering: "There sit the men who pull the strings of the Prime Minister of England. Under the threats of his Irish masters, under the pressure [pointing now to the Gladstonian benches] from his least experienced supporters, he comes down here to move a Resolution which is in contradiction of all the principles which he has declared in this House in the whole course of his parliamentary life."¹ The Government had concealed at the last election the vital details of the Bill and now did not dare to face the country. These were Tammany tactics. The Government had played their last card. The British Empire was being sold by private treaty. Well might the Nationalists sit silent. It was natural that the Irish parties, completing an underhand bargain, should say: "Why debate? What is the necessity of any discussion? We are satisfied—*pro tanto*." ²

CHAP.
XLV.
Æt. 57.

This is hard hitting, but it is mild compared with Nationalist cursing of Chamberlain at this time. They represented him as a destroyer whose only principle was "Evil, be thou my Good". To put it simply, they thought him in politics the nearest possible figure to the devil. Dismissing these absurdities, we must distinguish several very different elements of an explosive situation.

The Irish Nationalists—since without them there was no majority—were in fact working the guillotine at Westminster against the deepest convictions of the bulk of Great Britain. Here we may pass the question whether in all the circumstances the procedure was theoretically defensible. The important matter is that it was felt to be substantially insufferable by most of the representatives of Great Britain and by most of their constituents.

The Ministry was now sustained on division by majorities falling to 30 or less. In all other countries no written Constitution permitted on these slender and uncertain terms, or on anything like these terms, a permanent and fundamental change in the structure of the State. More than any proposal for a generation, this measure did in fact demand exceptional length

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xiv. (June 29, 1893).

² *Ibid.*

BOOK
X.
1893.

and thoroughness of discussion; and did demand a more predominant and settled support than could be claimed for it. For the most part debate had not been irrelevant, but closely addressed to points requiring consideration.

But, next, it is not to be denied that Chamberlain meant to the utmost to play out time. And for three objects. First, to defeat the Ministerial plan of carrying Home Rule not on its separate merits but by the Newcastle programme and its "log-rolling federation". Second, to make the Unionist case sink deeper by degrees into the mind of the country. Third, so to delay and thwart the Government that closure in the Commons might furnish a crushing argument for the expected action of the House of Lords.

By the fatality of its position the Government, once formed, had no option but to force the Bill through by methods which only a far larger and more solid majority in the House, and one surer of its hold on the constituencies, could have made successful.

Fierce scenes followed in succession. Early in July Chamberlain pinned an old foe by one of his lightning thrusts. Always provided with a packet of more awkward quotations from Irish speeches than the Ministerialists could extract from his own, he recalled Dillon's threat that the Irish people when they came into control would "remember the police and other enemies". Pleading that he had spoken emotionally after the "Mitchelstown massacre", Dillon melted the House. Springing to his feet, Chamberlain produced the deadly proof that the speech thus palliated by the Member for East Mayo had been delivered long before the alleged excuse—nine months before the Mitchelstown affray took place.¹ It was like the case of the celebrated American veteran who was with Grant in Illinois—two years before the war. At this the Unionist benches shouted with exultation, while their opponents sat in misery. Next day Dillon apologised for his mistake, but its effect could not be expunged.

With as little success the Irish members suggested that their enemy for his other purposes had tried to buy them for his selfish ambitions by an offer of Home Rule when he wrote

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xiv. (July 3, 1893).

his private letter to Mr. Duignan of Walsall years ago.¹ They could have attempted nothing weaker, for the Radical leader, at the time recalled, was prepared to dare more on the Irish Question as on the democratic question than any other Minister. Easy was it for the Radical Unionist to prove that he had proposed subordinate self-government only—such as the Nationalists had unanimously repudiated—and that in the sequel his goodwill had been outrageously abused. Twenty-four hours later he was able to read to the House his vindication in the shape of a letter from Mr. Duignan himself. A hundred other of these minor encounters we must pass by.

CHAP.
XLV.
ÆT. 57.

Badgered for different reasons by the Irish parties and the Unionists, Ministers toward mid-July made a mighty blunder. Knocked to pieces by criticism was their "In and Out" method of retaining Irish representation at Westminster. Abandoning that intermittent device, the Government proposed instead a permanent incubus. On July 12, 1893, other alternatives having failed to secure the approval of the House, Gladstone declared that the plan of unlimited voting was the only method left.² Irish members, reduced from 103 to 80, were to vote at Westminster on all questions. Ireland would thus have the double felicity of ruling herself yet disturbing Great Britain as before.

From that impossible proposal Home Rule never recovered. Ministers were brilliantly assailed by some of their own followers in the House and without. Absurd was the "In and Out" artifice, no doubt; but intolerable an Irish vote, sometimes bound to be a veto, in all British affairs after the Irish people were placed in sole charge of their own. There was nothing, as the Radical Unionist had contended from the first, between federal reconstruction of the United Kingdom and its real disruption.

Chamberlain's final weapon had been put into his hands. He had always said, what every ordered Constitution in the world witnessed, that Home Rule for any one part of the United Kingdom without federalism for the whole to ensure cohesion in common affairs must involve gross and ludicrous

¹ See Vol. I. pp. 578-580.

² Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xiv. (July 12, 1893).

anomalies. Here was illustration such as he had never thought to see.¹

In the dog-days of that summer he delivered another sulphurous indictment. Gladstone had referred to the "judgment of the country". Then why not consult it? The issue was whether the interests of Great Britain were to be controlled by delegates from Ireland—there he had better have stopped, but added—"nominated by priests, elected by illiterates and subsidised by the enemies of our country".² He challenged the Government to an immediate dissolution. Well grounded on his close knowledge of the constituencies, this confidence in the result of another struggle in the country was henceforth the fortified strength of his position. Against Liberalism he could appeal with virtual certainty to the people with or without "a capital P". When the next Thursday's operation of the guillotine followed this particular challenge, eighteen clauses were disposed of—seventeen of them without one single word of discussion or explanation. The coarse phrase just quoted repelled temperate Liberals by what they called its "jubilant malignancy", and it helped the Government to hold their waverers.

For a week or so after his former incessant activities he kept quiet in a mystifying manner. What did he mean? was the question on all sides. On July 21 he raked the financial clauses. These filled the Irish members themselves with discontent such as in 1886 Parnell had felt on the same subject when he thought of throwing out both Bill and Government, the bowl with the soup. More moderate in manner and words than the preceding effort, this performance was felt on all sides to be yet another pitiless exposure of Ministerial weaknesses.

VIII

The long-brooding storm muttered before raging. Strained by a thousand troubles, the Prime Minister himself made the atmosphere more combustible. His intimates doubted whether he

¹ It has been shown that when he stipulated in 1886 for the retention of Irish representatives he meant to make all consequential changes in Committee, reducing the measure to subordinate self-government and pro-

viding distinctive treatment for Ulster—separate treatment if "the other nation" in Northern Ireland insisted on it.

² Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xiv. (July 13, 1893).

could go on for many weeks. Yet in the Cabinet Morley and Harcourt, both differing deeply from Rosebery, were no longer on speaking terms with each other.¹

CHAP.
XLV.
Æt. 57.

On July 25 Gladstone fell upon Chamberlain. The Liberal Unionist leader, declared the Prime Minister, used "language of habitual, gross and enormous exaggeration"; he "constantly and deliberately, and with the utmost confidence and infallibility, ascribes to men who have a right to stand on a level with him, and who were at one time his colleagues and supposed to be his friends, motives for their acts the direct contrary of that which they state themselves, and motives which they indignantly disclaim". The Prime Minister described the Radical Unionist as playing generally in this trial the part of "Devil's Advocate".² Next day Chamberlain replied to this impassioned outbreak: Gladstone, he said, had made a "ferocious speech", and as to the ecclesiastical allusion, he had his unfailing repartee. "My right hon. friend, in a passage which was extremely humorous and which no-one enjoyed more than myself, compared me to the Devil's Advocate. . . . The function of the Devil's Advocate is often one which has been most usefully fulfilled. . . . It has been his privilege to expose many doubtful virtues and to destroy on more than one occasion the angelic theory. Sir, I modestly hope that I may enjoy a similar privilege."³

Retorting with studied brevity, he had got a good deal into a very few adept words. He intended on the following night to speak for a quarter of an hour, reviewing the Bill and depicting the political position with clinching terseness.

That intention was cut short by a parliamentary tempest.

July 27 was to be the last of forty-seven sittings in Committee. At ten o'clock the beheading-machine was to begin its final exercises. At a quarter to ten Chamberlain rose from his coign of vantage on the third bench below the gangway. His accents had his peculiarly ominous intonation—the under-swell of anger made more contagious by sardonic modulation of voice. Real and pent-up were the passions of that night. Though the guillotine was about to descend on masses of undiscussed clauses, the dense tiers of Unionist benches believed to a man

¹ *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, pp. 173, 191.

² *Hansard*, Fourth Series, vol. xv. (July 25, 1893).

³ *Ibid.* (July 26).

BOOK
X.
1893.

that the country was with them. This view Chamberlain meant to drive home with blistering mockery. His opponents felt that his sentences sprayed vitriol.

We may follow him as far as he got. He gibed—that the Government by the guillotine procedure had reduced to a discreditable farce the forms of the Mother of Parliaments. He jeered—that the Ministerialists regarded their Bill as perfect and unimprovable.

At this, Roby, an excellent Gladstonian, was misled to throw in the banal phrase, “under the circumstances”. It was notoriously unsafe to interrupt Chamberlain. No one approached him in seizing upon an interjection to improvise a satire. Quick as a flash he caught up the word and sported with it:

They think that—“under the circumstances”—the proposals cannot be improved. Yes, but they thought the last scheme was perfect and could not be improved. They think every scheme as it successively proceeds from the fertile brain of the Prime Minister is perfect and cannot be improved—“under the circumstances”. That has been their attitude with regard to the whole, notwithstanding the fact that the measure has been changed again and again in the course of the last few weeks. . . .

I say this Bill has been changed in its most vital features and yet it has always been found perfect by the hon. members behind the Treasury Bench.

The Prime Minister calls “black” and they say “it is good”; the Prime Minister calls “white” and they say “it is better”. It is always the voice of a god. Never since the time of Herod . . .¹

It is admitted that his tone and air, as he watched the clock so as to be sure of putting in as much as possible in a quarter of an hour, were quizzical, not savage; but at the last word—“Herod”—a furious cry broke, not for the first time that summer, from the Irish camp—“Judas!”² One more audible sentence, and only one, Chamberlain got in—“Never since the time of Herod has there been such slavish adulation”. Whether he tried to add another syllable never can be known. Typhoon swooped on the House.

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xv. (July 27, 1893).

² Often had the word been flung from the same quarter; as four weeks

before when Chamberlain in the first gagging debate had protested against making a fetish of the Prime Minister.

Above the "diversity of sounds, all horrible", to quote the Boatswain in *The Tempest*, the Irish benches shrilled "Judas! Judas!" Long ago Chamberlain had been made familiar with the same reference, and though undeniably wounded and indignant when first it was used—and afterwards with elaborate rancour by Labouchere—he had become immune. Had it rested with him no notice would have been taken of it. But on the other side of the House, Conservative members shouted to the Chairman that the words "be taken down". Mr. Mellor had not heard them. An amiable person, but a weak Chairman woefully unfitted to keep cool mastery of a disturbance like this, he ingeminated "Order, order", until the hubbub became a din.

CHAP.
XLV.
ÆT. 57.

That soulless neutral, the clock, touched ten. The Chairman rose to apply the closure. He was not heard nor heeded. Twice he sought to put the question to the cyclone. Members on the Ministerial side began to make for the lobbies. On the Opposition side some unknown voice called "Don't move". Like one of the familiar anonymous influences in revolutions, the unknown voice was obeyed. Many Unionists, crying "Gag! Gag!" refused to leave their seats until their grievance against the allusion to Iscariot was redressed.¹ Members who had hied prematurely to the lobbies drifted back.

Among them was Mr. Logan, member for the Harborough division of Leicestershire, a muscular Christian amongst the Gladstonians and now inflamed. Already members began to make a mob on the floor. The Chairman was a reed. Mr. Logan, it appears, reproaching some contiguous Unionists for their refusal to go out and divide, was by them brusquely rebuffed. Thereupon the member for Harborough strode over towards the seated Conservatives and, with strong observations, deposited himself on the Front Opposition Bench of all places, and beside Edward Carson of all persons. Inclined a moment after to amend his provocation and remove himself voluntarily, the robust Gladstonian found himself abruptly assisted from behind and propelled from the bench to the floor. At this sight of a friend in trouble the neighbouring Hibernians rushed across the gangway to the Conservative benches, where they at once

¹ Mr. Balfour had left the House intending not to take part in the division. Lord Randolph Churchill urged members near him to quit their benches.

BOOK

X.

1893.

jostled with the fiery and witty Ulsterman, Colonel Saunderson, and with others.

Then came the scandal. Members were seen to be exchanging blows as by automatic impulse. In the disreputable scuffle a few hats were knocked off, fewer coats were pulled away, slight bruises were distributed. The dread rebuke of hissing from the gallery helped to recall the House to its senses.

In truth, this affair was preposterously though honestly exaggerated in the newspapers. From all the galleries it looked worse than it was. Only a handful of members had lost their heads and their hats. It seems certain that not half a dozen were at fisticuffs. The majority in the *mêlée* meant to be peace-makers. From above, they looked like combatants as they thrust out their arms in their pacific attempts to separate the pugilists.

When this spectacle had lasted three or four minutes, members called for the Speaker. Mr. Peel's appearance was magical. As he resumed the Chair his commanding and severe countenance induced soberness and remorse. Mr. T. P. O'Connor apologised for having flung the incendiary word.

We remarked above that Chamberlain himself would not have noticed the cry of "Judas". Had his wish prevailed, the row would not have occurred. How often Disraeli and Gladstone in turn had been likened to Satan and Beelzebub. Why did the cry of "Judas", in itself nothing new, fire the magazine of accumulated bad feeling on this occasion? One commonplace answer is that the physical atmosphere was heated. Members had been fanning themselves with their order-papers. Another answer is that poor Mr. Mellor was not in robust health. A couple of weeks before the row, in reply to a commiserating word from Highbury, he had confessed:

May 20, 1893.—From J. W. Mellor, M.P.— . . . I can only suppose that these rumours have got abroad in consequence of my having had the influenza hanging about, ever since I have been Chairman. The quinine that I have had to take has made me a little deaf and the illness rather weak. If I can keep my health I intend to go on. . . . The principal complaint is that my voice is not as gruff as Courtney's. They might with more reason complain that I do not wear the same coloured clothes. . . .

Not blaming individual members on either side of the House, the majority of the country regarded the scuffle on the floor as a symbol of muddle. In England at least, where resided nearly three-quarters of the whole population of the United Kingdom, most average citizens sickened of Home Rule.

CHAP.
XLV.
ÆT. 57.

IX

The heart was now out of the controversy in the House of Commons. The excitement of July was followed in August by an anti-climax of utter lassitude. The Bill had passed through Committee. *The Times*, by the sort of massive stroke that the old journalism could deliver, published a whole page, with a single headline and some italics, giving the text of the Bill as it now stood, and showing that out of thirty-seven clauses only ten had been discussed at all, four of those only in part. Twenty-eight clauses and all the schedules had been put through without debate. The Report stage, so far from signifying the usual acceptance of the inevitable, lasted through the whole of August, the Unionists still belabouring a measure that, though trailed forward, was defunct.

Gladstone decreed—and could not help himself—that the Report stage also must be abrogated by the guillotine.

At once Chamberlain gave notice of an amendment, protesting against the degradation of the House of Commons to a registration agency, and demanding the dissolution of Parliament at the earliest opportunity in order that the nation in the light of knowledge might pronounce on matters concealed or at least unknown at the last General Election. This amendment he moved on August 21, and in rather less than an hour he supplied the Unionist campaign in the constituencies with a store of arms. Well informed of the extent of misgiving and depression in the Cabinet, he suggested that only Gladstone and Morley loved the Bill. The majority for the Bill, he said, in his less estimable style, had been created largely “by priests, illiterates and moonlighters”. From that garish stuff he passed to a far more convincing analysis. There was no true majority in the country for any single item in the medley of the Government’s prospectus. The Government itself was the creation of

BOOK
X.
1893.

a system of "political log-rolling" carried beyond example. The Ministerial sections only voted together for anything because each of them wanted something else. The Welsh members voted for Home Rule because they wanted Disestablishment; the teetotallers voted for Disestablishment because they wanted local veto; and the Labour party voted for everything because they wanted an eight-hours day. The Government "trample on the liberties of the House and they gag opponents they are unable to answer. . . . To destroy an Empire; to punish England for not having given him [Gladstone] a majority; to break up a party to which, after all, even his fame and reputation owe a great deal—these are not enough for the First Lord of the Treasury; he must also stifle discussion and humiliate the House of Commons. . . . And so I say that your majority is not a homogeneous majority and such as it is will be swept entirely away when once more an appeal is made."¹

At last, at a quarter to one in the morning of September 2, after eighty-two nights' debate on a measure that by no possibility could become law in that Parliament, the Third Reading was carried by a majority of 34 in the House of Commons—a futile majority only made possible by the over-representation of Ireland in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom. Chamberlain's concluding speech, a moderated and telling performance, was heard by the Ministerialists with quietness and uneasy respect. He denied that there had been excessive examination of a Bill "so exceptional in its character, so gigantic in its probable results, of such transcendent importance". He warned the Ministerialists that the "gag" might yet be used against them with as much ruthlessness. "Cannot you for once put yourselves in our place and feel as you would feel if for a moment you could share our convictions? . . . If we believe, as we sincerely and honestly do, that the policy of the Government is fatal to those interests which we are here to guard, do you think that any opposition could be too strenuous, too prolonged?"

Traversing the whole ground of the Bill, he fastened again upon the glaring anomaly. Ireland, practically uncontrolled in her own affairs, was still to interfere "in every act of British

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xvi. (August 21, 1893).

legislation and taxation". " 'Ireland for the Irish' is a very good and a very plausible cry, but I think that 'England for the English' will be a still better cry." He closed on the prophecy that the British people on the first occasion would give the death-blow to the policy embodied in the Bill.¹

CHAP.
XLV.
ÆT. 57.

Next day he describes his sanguine view of the future:

TO THE DUCHESS OF ST. ALBANS

September 2.—We have done with the Home Rule Bill, in the House of Commons at last. . . . I sincerely believe we have killed it. . . . It has been so knocked about that there is no strength in it, and I am sure the more serious Gladstonians know they are beaten. All my accounts from the country are favourable and if there were a General Election this autumn, we would have a good majority. The enemy hope to retrieve themselves by the Newcastle Programme, but I think they are mistaken. They cannot satisfy all the greedy sections and in spite of their desperate energy they are doomed men.

In the House of Lords, a week later, after a good and short debate, the Second Home Rule Bill was thrown out by a majority of ten to one.

The Peers in all their history never were more confident that they spoke for a majority of the nation. Long before, the Unionist leaders had made up their minds. In the intermittent Diary kept at this period there is a curious note containing Chamberlain's suggestion, forty years ago, to introduce the Referendum into the British Constitution:

February 28, 1893.—Lord Salisbury, Duke of Devonshire, A. J. Balfour in Lord S.'s room at House of Lords to discuss procedure on Home Rule Bill. . . . I suggested that if the House of Lords intended to give way in the event of the Bill being sent up a second time, it might be well to pass the Bill at once with a clause requiring a Referendum. Mr. G. must either accept the Bill with this condition or take the responsibility of throwing it out because he would not face an appeal to the country on this issue alone. Lord Salisbury said he could not bring himself to vote for 2nd Reading and did not believe his party would accept Bill in any case. He was however in favour of Referendum. I said that of course the question did not arise if the House were likely to throw out the Bill even after a General Election resulting in a majority for Mr. G.²

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xvi. (September 1, 1893).

² Chamberlain's Occasional Diary, February 28, 1893.

BOOK

X.

1893.

Though already determined to carry resistance to the constitutional extremity, the Unionists had not dared to dream that the great emergency would arise under conditions so favourable. They had expected a stormy challenge from the Home Rule allies; a desperate struggle in the constituencies; with the possibility of a convulsion as in 1832, if Mr. Gladstone won a majority and sent up the Bill again.

Now, in autumn when the deed was done by the Peers, how different was the situation and how tame. The Bill in its later form had prejudiced the whole policy. The measure flung out, "no dog barked". Profound was national indifference.

None the less, the crucial moment for Liberal fortunes was then and not afterwards. The only hope lay in daring to "put it to the touch to win or lose it all". The public apathy would have been broken up by Gladstone's last summons to battle; and from the polls Liberalism might well have come back powerful if not quite victorious. That course would at least have had the heroic touch. Instead, the submissive sequel was bathos. The Lords were denounced, but the battle was shunned—put off, as we shall see, with too evident fear. This was taken by the ordinary unfixed persons who decide elections as a proof that in the opinion of Ministers themselves there was no majority for Home Rule itself, and that they flinched from fighting on it. In a word, from this time a growing bulk of the British people believed that the Government had shown the white feather; that the Lords were confessed the better interpreters of public opinion; and that the Unionists were the more solid, courageous and capable party of the two.

So much luck as this, Chamberlain had never expected. Up and down the country he challenged Ministers to face the constituencies and poured scorn on their shrinking. He felt sure now that they would be more deeply lost the longer they hesitated.

X

In the last twelve months, no more buoyed up by any hope, yet chained by honour, Gladstone had approached decrepitude—his eyesight too dim for reading, his deafness settling, his voice weakening. For all his engaging rallies and happy

interludes, his underlying fatigue necessarily increased, and in full debate he was not always equal to his fame. Failing day by day, he had become the physical shadow of himself. The Cabinet, full of squabbles and antipathies, vaguely surmised that the Peers, flushed with arrogance, might do for themselves if given time and supplied with temptation enough to bully and blunder. The Unionist leaders were too shrewdly discriminating to be taken in that snare. The Liberal Unionists especially were a sure safeguard against hereditary excesses.

CHAP.
XLV.
Æt. 57.

When the insupportable session was resumed in November, the Employers' Liability Bill and the Parish Councils Bill were to be passed by the Commons and sent to the Upper House in the hope that the Peers in each case would behave like blind malefactors. From the earlier stages of debate on each of these measures Chamberlain abstained—deliberately reserving himself for the later situations. During the Committee stage of the industrial project he was on the other side of the Atlantic, but on returning struck into the Third Reading debate (November 23). His practical experience as a manufacturer had convinced him that the Employers' Liability Bill, though in some respects an improvement on the existing state of the law, was on too narrow a basis; that it did little for the better protection of workers against injury; that unjustly it left an immense number of accidents uncompensated; that it blundered by abolishing voluntary arrangements which in many cases gave better terms than were provided by the Bill itself. Some months before, he notes:

August 17.—I told Asquith yesterday that he had made a great mistake and lost the seat at Hereford.¹ He was very cross and denied absolutely that the Employers' Liability Bill had anything to do with the matter. All my reports are to the effect that it undoubtedly changed a number of railway votes.

Asquith, the Home Secretary, protested that general and universal insurance was not demanded by public opinion; an experiment of that magnitude would be a leap in the dark.

All social reformers agree that Chamberlain was right and the Liberal Cabinet backward. He foresaw the future when he

¹ The Unionists, to their jubilation, had just won that by-election.

BOOK

X.

1893.

desired to make compensation universal and insurance the basis. He was yet to advance that question. His practical grip of this and of all industrial matters disconcerted the Liberal Ministers.

The House of Lords so managed the matter on Employers' Liability that no clear issue could be raised. It was certain at the end of the year that the Peers would accept the Bill if amended by allowing contracting-out, but otherwise would reject. The Government—still nominally Gladstone's Government—had put themselves in another quandary. They must either seem to accept superior wisdom from the House of Lords, or by refusal to compromise would lose the Bill. There was not the least prospect of rousing popular indignation against the Peers on the Employers' Liability Bill any more than on Home Rule.

XI

On the other hand, Chamberlain well knew that unless the Peers were persuaded to be careful where most inclined to go wrong, the Parish Councils Bill might be a much more dangerous issue. We need not enter into its details. It was a measure included in the grand design he had himself framed during his few weeks' tenure of the Local Government Board in 1886. With consummate judgment, he was bent on securing the passage of this Bill and reducing the interference of the Peers to a minimum.

The success of this policy thwarted the last Liberal hope of effective action against the Second Chamber, and, as we shall soon see, accelerated Gladstone's withdrawal from public life.

With the same dexterity, Chamberlain extricated himself from another personal dilemma on the question of "betterment"—at the time a blessed word. The London County Council sought to legalise the principle that persons profiting by public improvements should contribute to the cost. The Peers boggled at an idea capable, they thought, of alarming extension. They asked the House of Commons to join in appointing a Select Committee on the subject. These overtures were spurned. Chamberlain seldom was more audaciously adroit in minor tactics than when he pleaded blandly with the Government to allow the anxious Peers a *locus poenitentiae*!

His last utterance of note in 1893, another of his principal years, was heard a few days before Christmas (December 19). The subject was the strength of the fleet. The experts held, national instinct being strongly with them, that the conditions of sea-power were rapidly altering to our disadvantage by the activity of the new Dual Alliance in naval construction. Statements in the House were disquieting and Ministerial replies unsatisfactory. Against his own side, Dilke, who had once wished above all things to be First Lord of the Admiralty, insisted that the leaders of both parties were inclined rather to underrate than exaggerate the gravity of the situation.

CHAP.
XLV.
Æt. 57.

As in days long ago, Chamberlain intervened in debate to reinforce his old companion. He declared that the Franco-Russian alliance must be reckoned with. While the Treasury Bench was administering platitudes to the House, we were putting our national life at the mercy of a combination. In face of the rising expenditure of France and Russia on naval armaments, British supremacy at sea could not be maintained without augmented exertion. He did not trust the perception or capacity of the Government.

In the misused name of the Admiralty and its professional advisers, Harcourt scouted the graver view. Forty-eight hours later he had to confess that it was a view sternly held by the Sea-Lords themselves. Their dread hint of resignation in a body compelled the Chancellor of the Exchequer to withdraw his misstatement of their opinions. At Highbury that Christmas, Chamberlain little knew how critical this question had become in the Cabinet or what historic consequences were at hand.

XII

The record of a distant holiday in the autumn of this beligerent twelvemonth throws in the most unexpected way full light on his temperament. He voyaged to the Bahamas, and adventures being thrust upon him, he excels in description. "Strange that on this short trip I should have seen two of the most exciting things I have ever seen." In his dread of rhetoric and diffuseness he curbed and compressed himself too much on

BOOK
X.
1893.

the platform and in the House of Commons. His public style was much of the man, far from all the man. Full of imaginative susceptibility as he was, his non-political letters have sometimes a glow and a colour seldom found in his speeches. He responded to the two voices—"one of the sea, one of the mountains". As the Alps had moved him in his youth, so now did the Atlantic when he left its common crossings and became closely acquainted with storm and wreck.

When in America with Mrs. Chamberlain in the autumn of 1893, he took occasion to sail off to his sisal plantations in the Bahamas, and was accompanied by his two sons. Some extracts from his letters to his wife are better than any summary:

New York, October 12, 1893.—Judge Bigham kept me in conversation as far as Springfield and introduced me to a gentleman in the train who turned out to be Mr. Olney. [At that time Attorney-General in the United States and subsequently President Cleveland's Secretary of State.] After some pleasant conversation with him, I said, "Mr Olney, I have a message from my wife for you. She did not know that I should meet you, but if she had I am sure she would have asked you to let her see her brother". [Then Mr. Olney's private secretary.] "Why, certainly", he said, "I will express him off to her to-night—there is no reason why he should not go now." I hope this will come off, and if so it will be some compensation to you for the loss of your husband.

S.S. Niagara, October 16.—At 3 P.M. we started in this ship, which is a very stout built affair very heavily laden, and, truth compels me to add, very dirty and uncomfortable. . . . The first night we had a splendid sunset like one of the darkest of the Egyptian ones, very stormy and grand, with dark streaks of glowering light piled one upon the other. . . . It was a stormy night and the next day and night it blew a hurricane all the time. The ship rolled and pitched, took in water continually and most of the cabins were wet, though mine happily escaped. . . . The sea was so rough that the engines went dead slow for ten hours and we made very little way. On the Saturday morning we woke to find ourselves in the Gulf Stream, which we were crossing for the next eighteen hours or so. The hurricane was over, but the sea was still very tossed and stormy.

Then at 8 A.M. on Sunday came our first adventure. A ship in distress made signals to us and we stopped, and after hailing, took off her crew.

It appeared that it was a brig which had been for four days in the gales. Her quarters were damaged—her masts broken—and five feet of water in the hold. The captain said she would have sunk in ten hours, and as neither the ship nor the cargo were worth saving, the crew set her on fire before leaving. It was a weird sight even in the daytime to see the ship labouring heavily and flames pouring up from the hold. . . .

CHAP.
XLV.
Æt. 57

We had another most lovely sunset—this time mild and benign. Rose and mauve radiated from where the sun had set in brightest gold, and were interspersed with streaks of deepest violet shading to azure blue. It was really fairy-like and we all wished you could see it.

About 9 P.M. the look-out hailed a fire on the bow, and those who had good eyes could just distinguish a faint glow on the horizon. We made straight for the light, which we reached about 10.30 after every kind of conjecture as to its origin. It proved to be a very large passenger ship—on fire almost to the water's edge; its interior was like a molten furnace, a perfectly even glow from stem to stern. It was a most beautiful and at the same time a terrible sight. Probably it was a ship with anthracite coal. It might have been fired by the crew, as was the case with the vessel we had succoured in the morning, or it might have caught fire and been deserted. When we saw it no living thing could possibly exist in it. We think that the crew must have been carried off long before, as there was nobody to be seen anywhere, and it is certain that they would have stayed near the wreck as the fire served as a beacon to call for aid.

Is it not strange that on this short trip I should have seen two of the most exciting things I have ever seen? I have never seen anything at all on longer voyages. I should tell you that everybody says that such a passage as we have had is quite extraordinary. One passenger has made twenty voyages and never met with anything like it.

Government House, Nassau, October 17.—This morning I am to be presented with an address—confound it! The cyclone was very severe and the sea washed away roads, houses, etc., but no damage has been done to any of the plantations.

All this about fire and storm at sea was more like the "Ancient Mariner" than the Parish Councils Bill, but we see that at heart he was as naturally an active romantic as Gladstone an intense theologian. Chamberlain's chance meeting with Mr. Olney was to be useful to this country after a Venezuelan crisis not then foreseen by either. The plantations were to cheat his visions and

BOOK bring him as near to breaking as he ever came amidst private
X. difficulties. Eighteen months later, just before political victory
1893. was in his grasp, he had to consider in dead earnest whether he
could afford to continue in public life. The Unionist cause was
very nearly lost in the Bahamas.

CHAPTER XLVI

CHAMBERLAIN AND GLADSTONE'S EXIT—THE LIBERAL EPILOGUE—"FILLING UP THEIR OWN CUP"

(1894)

A VITAL Question—Will the Lords go too far?—Chamberlain's Stand against Reaction—The Parish Councils Bill saved—Liberalism will not face the Peers—Gladstone's Greatness and Resignation—Last Meetings between Chamberlain and Gladstone in Retirement—A Happy Visit—"The Old Man is Incomparable"—The Eclipse of Home Rule—Chamberlain and Lord Rosebery's Ordeal—"Filling up their own Cup"—Harcourt and Local Veto—Gladstone blesses Chamberlain and the Gothenburg System—Liberal Confusions—The Unionist Era and Chamberlain's Programme.

I

FROM this point, for momentous weeks, secret influences sway the open course of things in a manner revealed by the disclosures of recent times. Two days after New Year's Day 1894, the House of Commons in its dullest mood resumed the Parish Councils Bill. The Government had already doomed their Employers' Liability Bill by rejecting "contracting-out" as upheld by the Peers. Gladstone abhorred the increase in the Admiralty estimates. His colleagues, even John Morley, wished him to go, and soon.¹ For most of the younger Liberals his magic was spent and his lingering an encumbrance. Of these younger elements there were three schools—the Radical reformers who were also anti-Imperialists; the new Liberal Imperialists, whose hero was Lord Rosebery; and those mingling the feelings of the

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

¹ "Jan. 12, 1894.— . . . To John Morley, who said he cared nothing, nor took any interest, in what was done. If after all this anguish, these tragedies, Mr. Gladstone was to stay

he would have no part or parcel in it, as Mr. Gladstone would have lost all authority" (*Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, p. 241).

BOOK X. two former. These three groups shaded into one another at that phase.

1894.

Lord Salisbury desires a full interview with Chamberlain. His feeling against certain features of the Parish Councils Bill is alarmingly strong. How would a possible rejection of both Bills by the House of Lords affect public opinion? In reply Chamberlain draws up a full, clear-headed memorandum. On Employers' Liability he is confident that the Second Chamber is on safe ground. On the other question his contrary view is emphatic.

TO SALISBURY

Memorandum.—January 25, 1894.—In considering the action to be taken by the House of Lords in regard to the Bills sent to it by the House of Commons it is of course necessary to bear in mind the effect which may be produced upon public opinion by any amendments which lead to the loss of these Bills. The Gladstonians will naturally throw the whole blame upon the House of Lords, and, although such amendment may be in itself perfectly defensible, the electors are likely to look at general results rather than at the methods by which they have been reached.

It must also be evident that any prejudice against the House of Lords in consequence of the rejection of any one Bill will be cumulative, if their intervention has the same effect in the case of several Bills, and, even if the House of Lords might safely amend or reject, say, the Employers' Liability Bill, it does not follow that they could prudently take the same course with regard to the Parish Councils Bill. . . .

The Gladstonians would undoubtedly have a strong cry for the country if they could say that every single measure proposed by them and accepted by the House of Commons had been knocked out of shape and made impossible by the House of Lords. . . .

I think that amendments made by the House of Lords in any Bill now before it should, if possible, have considerable popular support behind them, or should be of such a character as not to endanger the passing of the Bill.

Employers' Liability Bill

In this case, although I have no doubt that all the official strength and influence of the Trades Unions is against contracting-out, yet there is a considerable amount of popular feeling in favour of voluntary arrangements. . . .

The course which I have suggested to Mr. Balfour is that the Lords should maintain the principle of the Dudley amendment, and should further amend it so as to make it still more favourable to the work-people. . . .

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

Parish Councils Bill

If the line suggested above with regard to the Employers' Liability Bill be taken in the House of Lords, it will be imperative, for the reason stated in my prefatory remarks, that they should deal tenderly with the Parish Councils Bill. . . .

Altogether, it will be seen that I am against serious amendments to the Parish Councils Bill. I do not believe that they would be assented to by the Government, and I should be anxious for the result if the Gladstonians were able to say that this Bill had been thrown out by the representatives of the landlords in the Upper House.

II

This memorandum was one of the more important documents of the time. It determined for the Conservatives that policy of sagacious discrimination which defeated the Liberal hope of working up a great national threat to the House of Lords. The same views, needless to say, the Radical Unionist pressed on the Duke of Devonshire.

But he did more. Secretly and confidentially he wrote to the Minister in charge, Sir Henry Fowler—one who since 1886 had always shown him marked consideration—urging that the Parish Councils Bill should be saved. What points did the Government consider vital? "I think that with good will on both sides we might get round the dangerous corner."

TO SIR HENRY FOWLER

Secret and Confidential.—February 7, 1894.—MY DEAR FOWLER, I assume that you are sincerely desirous of carrying the Parish Councils Bill. I doubt if all your colleagues are of the same mind.

I also am really anxious that its main provisions should become law—although some of my friends may be indifferent or even hostile.

Under these circumstances, if you liked to—and can without breach of confidence—tell me what are, in your private opinion, the vital points,

BOOK I think that with good will on both sides, we might get round the
X. dangerous corner.

1894.

There must be concessions on both sides if this is to be effected, but if you are not irreconcilable—and the matter is in your hands—I believe I might help you to a settlement.

If you do not think so destroy this note, which is for your private information *alone*.—Yours very truly,
J. CHAMBERLAIN.

This bold initiative risked in confidence led at once to prosperous conversations.

Liberal Unionist influence never was more effectively exercised than by its leader in the House of Commons during the following three weeks. Not all the credit falls to him. A large share of it belongs to the wisdom of the Duke of Devonshire. Sometimes the situation became sharp enough to revive Gladstonian hopes. In mid-February a meeting at Devonshire House warned Lord Salisbury that the Peers must restrain themselves and that Tory feeling must give way. Chamberlain more than once supported Liberalism against the Lords' amendments. His determined object on this question was compromise between the two Houses, not collision. The parliamentary eye-witness often cited remarks:

December 1.—There are only two men in the House whose rising in Committee on this Bill causes a flutter in the dulled pulse. One is Mr. Chamberlain, the other is Sir William Harcourt. Mr. Chamberlain's command over the attention of the House was never more triumphantly vindicated than to-night, when, a word going round that he was on his feet, members taking refuge from the Bill in the Lobby, the smoking-room or the reading-room trooped in to listen.¹

Another passage (February 16, 1895) recalls a more piquant scene. Lord Cranborne defended the other House on its proposal to refuse the use of school-rooms for parish politics—tap-rooms being the alternative to school-rooms:

Mr. Chamberlain, standing below the gangway . . . startled his audience by speaking disrespectfully of the House of Lords. . . . Sir William Harcourt beat Lord Salisbury's son about the head with extracts from a speech delivered in other circumstances a short time back when he

¹ Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Home Rule Parliament*, p. 288.

advocated a directly opposite view. This was awkward, but easily borne in comparison with Chamberlain's brief, almost contemptuous intimation that if the noble Lord insisted on taking a division, he should go into the Lobby against him. . . . Mr. Chamberlain went on in his incisive manner ruthlessly to describe what he called the absurdity of the position in which the Bill would be placed were the Lords' amendment agreed to. The Conservatives sat in appalled silence while the Liberals greedily listened.¹

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

At the end of February the passage of the Parish and District Councils Bill through both Houses was assured. No inflammatory charge could be raised against the Peers on the score of their slight modifications. The Employers' Liability Bill Ministers had abandoned on what was regarded as a side-issue by the country. The working classes failed to give any sign of insurrection. No effective cry against the House of Lords remained. To bring about this situation Chamberlain had worked in public and private. He knew now that the last Liberal hope of carrying Home Rule on the shoulders of the Newcastle programme had been defeated in advance of the polls, let the General Election come when it might.

III

The success of these tactics, wherein Chamberlain played the most active and discerning part, led to an immense change in public life. Mr. Gladstone resigned. Nothing can convey to our time an adequate sense of what that withdrawal seemed then to signify. Were St. Paul's to vanish from the aspect of London, the sense of vacancy could not be greater. Only one other event in that generation, the death of Queen Victoria, created a similar impression of an epoch departing.

Two men of different generations and opposite types had found their fates tightly interknotted. Gladstone's exit from public life had an effect so immediate and far-reaching on Chamberlain's public position, leaving him at once more central and conspicuous, that some circumstances of farewell must be recalled.

¹ Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Home Rule Parliament*, pp. 299-300.

BOOK
X.
1894.

After the rejection of the Second Home Rule Bill a melancholy change came over Mr. Gladstone. Shortly after he entered upon his eighty-fifth year his blindness and deafness were growing worse and his apprehension of what was said becoming uncertain. Some psychic power of hope and prowess which had upborne his age since he conceived his new vision at the end of 1885 seemed to have broken within him. No longer had he a political future except in the chances of that one last battle for which his colleagues showed no stomach. The more he felt out of touch with the present and dim with regard to most of its interests, the more vividly and stubbornly he reverted to principles and precedents of his middle life, when by contrast with Palmerston he asserted economy against armaments.

Now the Board of Admiralty, to his extreme horror, were unanimous and unyielding in proposing large additions to naval expenditure, nor could the necessity be denied by modern knowledge of European facts. The large majority of his colleagues were against him on the merits. All of them, with perhaps one exception, were for the Estimates on the grounds of expediency. Otherwise the whole Board of Admiralty would resign; the Liberal party would be disrupted again and crushed at the polls. The Cabinet with amazement began to realise that Gladstone, as though his mind lived in his fifties, was bent on an indomitable struggle against Palmerston's ghost. Saturated with dissensions among themselves for other reasons, they all saw that he must go.

The regretful barrier to his will was, singular to say, Earl Spencer, who had most encouraged his precipitancy in 1886, but now as First Lord spoke for an inflexible Board of Admiralty. When the Hawarden kite, the green kite, soared up so long ago—but like yesterday it must have seemed to Gladstone—the situation lent itself to the most fervid conjectures. Nothing had turned out as he then supposed. After the epic of his efforts, was a perfunctory shuffling out to be the end of it? That indeed was now the inevitable end, but in his great heart he was not willing to accept it. He longed for release, but still dreamed of no tame exit.

Before Christmas Rosebery, dwelling upon the Premier's decay,

wished he had retired in 1880, or at least a few months ago when the Lords threw out Home Rule.¹

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

A week or so after New Year 1894 there was "a determination on the part of the Cabinet that Mr. Gladstone must go *now* or not at all".² He said he was ready to retire at once. They wished it, but did not press. He went to Biarritz and left them for weeks in the extremity of distraction. His nearest adherents, like John Morley and his slaving, invaluable factotum Sir Algernon West, he drove to despair. Nothing could bring him to a sense of modern necessities. Nothing mattered to him in spirit, it seemed, but righteous resistance to Palmerston's ghost. "Mr. Gladstone", said Harcourt, "was ruining his party for the second time."³ But Mr. Gladstone in two sentences reveals the very heart of his psychology in his last decade or so. "The plan is mad; and who are they who propose it? Men who were not born when I had been in public life for years." "Mr. Gladstone thinks like Mrs. Poyser that the young generation is a poor contrivance for carrying on the world."⁴

At the end of January the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in one of the celebrated announcements of newspaper history, asserted that Gladstone was about to retire. An ambiguous disclaimer from Biarritz convinced shrewd minds that the apocalyptic word was true.

But it was by no means so simple. Here justice must be done to Gladstone's spirit, unconquerable in itself to the last though finally thwarted by his Cabinet. He still wished to dissolve, and either win a last victory or go down with harness on his back. For his party as well as for himself he was highly in the right.

Morally abandoned as he felt himself, and infirm in the flesh as he was, never had he appeared so great by comparison with the lieutenants—we may call them *diadochi* expectant not confident—now in haste to dispense with him. Half blind physically, he was as clear in mind as Milton so far as concerned the last fighting chance for his Irish policy. He was still a giant in essential vision as in courage. Five months earlier he ought at any cost to have forced the issue against the Peers or else retired.

¹ *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, p. 227 (December 14, 1893).

² *Ibid.* p. 235 (January 8, 1894).

Ibid. p. 241 (January 12).

Ibid. pp. 255, 261 (January 1 and January 29).

BOOK
X.
1894.

Now in mid-February 1894 he was prepared, in his eighty-sixth year, to give the signal for a crusade against the House of Lords and to slur over for the electoral period the difference about naval estimates. Not one of his colleagues agreed with him, and nothing is surer than that he saw through the futility of their alternative ideas concerning electioneering policy. His obsolete unreason on national defence in face of foreign armaments and combinations he would have veiled. His appeal on the historic case of "the Peers *versus* the people", though full of doubt and hazard like all memorable enterprises, would have been by far the best chance—while not a conquering chance—that Liberalism was to know for a dozen years to come, or that Home Rule was to know for twenty.

Early in February the Prime Minister still felt, though pointing to his eyes, that "he had strength enough and physique enough for the fight with the Lords". If only the Peers would complete their tale of iniquities by assassinating the Parish Councils Bill. But the sagacity of Liberal Unionist policy guided by Chamberlain had induced the Peers severely to restrain themselves on the question of democratic government in rural districts and parishes. The narrowed issue offered no ground to deploy in mass for a pitched battle with the Peers. A settlement between the two Houses was certain. Gladstone's colleagues intimated to him that his idea of dissolution was impossible. The Government were deprived of reasonable pretext for dropping the Parish Councils Bill like the Employers' Liability Bill, and for proclaiming that the Peers, in lust for promiscuous slaughter, exceeded the professional murderers in *Macbeth*. No inducement to continue in public life was left to Gladstone. Too well he recognised, and with some scorn of his colleagues, that the enthusiasm of 1886 had evaporated and that he and his party were no longer of one heart. Months before he had sighed the inmost of his regrets. "I can do nothing more for Ireland."¹ For his cherished dream from his seventy-sixth to his eighty-fifth year he ought to have had some fighting lieutenant like Chamberlain at his side. None near him was of that calibre.

¹*Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, p. 229 (December 18, 1894).

IV

On March 1 he bade farewell to his Cabinet. Warning the Peers of a wrath to come, he made a last speech in the House of Commons and never entered it again. A few days later Chamberlain spoke at Birmingham:

CHAP.
XLVI.
ÆT. 58.

The active public life of the greatest parliamentary orator and statesman of our time has been terminated. . . . I have known Mr. Gladstone for more than seventeen years, and during five or six years of that time I was of course intimately connected with him. I will say that never have I known his energy more remarkable, his resources more infinite, his eloquence more persuasive or his skill in debate more admirable than during the last twelve months and during the course of the discussions upon the Home Rule Bill. . . . I will say for myself here in your presence that, although to my deep regret during the last few years, I have felt it my duty to oppose to the uttermost Mr. Gladstone's policy, I have never, either in private or in public, said one single word derogatory to his transcendent abilities and to his personal worth.¹

There was a moving sequel between them. Perhaps Gladstone was the only living man towards whom Chamberlain in his mature period felt the sentiment called reverence.² He much wished for a private meeting, doubted whether his initiative would be welcome, but at last risked it, and wrote asking whether his old leader would like to see him. The response was a most courteous invitation.

At the end of July, Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlain visited Dollis Hill. The patriarch himself, for all his four-score years and nigh five, met them on the doorstep full of cheerfulness and looking very spruce in a summer suit with a flower in his button-hole. The day was so hot that luncheon was laid in the open under a spreading tree. Mr. Gladstone gave his arm to Mrs. Chamberlain, the Unionist statesman to Mrs. Gladstone, and so they went across the lawn to table. That occasion was always a happy remembrance to our subject, and that night he set down his impressions.³

¹ At Liberal Unionist Club, Birmingham, March 7, 1894.

² We have seen in the first volume that for Gladstone in the early 'seven-

ties Chamberlain had no reverence.

³ Chamberlain's Occasional Diary, 1890-96.

CHAMBERLAIN AND GLADSTONE: A FAREWELL

(July 28, 1894)

BOOK
X.
1894.

By appointment went with Mary to call on Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone at Dollis Hill. Mrs. Gladstone was depressed and referred constantly to the past with regret. Mr. Gladstone was well and cheerful. He was most cordial and thanked us for our visit and seemed really pleased to see us. I told him that we missed him very much in the House of Commons.

"You are very kind", he said, and then with apparent feeling, "You have often been very kind to me." Yet this is the man with whom the Gladstonians suppose I am at daggers drawn.

We talked of current politics. He said that he could not read the papers and only knew what was going on from the extracts read to him. He did not understand the details of the Budget Bill, but thought that the Treasury administration, especially in regard to valuation of estates and property, must always remain the same in spite of new laws. I gathered from Mr. G.'s tone that there was some coolness between him and Harcourt.

In all things he spoke with a detached air as if he were an outsider, impartial and almost indifferent—and he seemed almost to have forgotten the active part he had been taking only a few months ago. Thus of Welsh Disestablishment he said it would be monstrous to confiscate private endowments—although this was partially done in the Bills brought in while he was Premier. Of the Arrears (Irish) Act, he said that in any settlement of Irish tenants' debts he thought the "gombeen man" was the last person to be considered—he ought to have less favour than any other creditor—yet in 1887 he gave no support to the bankruptcy proposals which were lost owing to Dillon's opposition because the usurer or gombeen man was to submit to the same reduction as the landlord.¹

Speaking of the abnormally prolonged Session of 1893, he said it was very singular that the mortality of the House of Commons had been less than usual. "A great misfortune I call it", he said,² apparently holding that the experiment he made ought not to be repeated, and fearing that the fact that nobody had been killed by it would induce his successors to try it again.

He said he had heard Canning make one of his best speeches in the

¹ This had been Chamberlain's own project.

² Evidently meaning the long session, not the low mortality.

House of Commons about reform¹—and Canning was more hated—with greater virulence—than any man in his whole experience.

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

In answer to a question he said after some consideration that he did not think the oratory of Parliament when he first knew it was better than now. The average was higher in the present day.

Sir Robert Peel was, of all the men he had ever known, the one possessed with the highest sense of public duty. When he died he had determined never to take office again, but Mr. G. thought that circumstances might have altered his determination if he had lived.

Mr G. had been counting up the number of separate individuals whom he had served with in Cabinets. They were 70, but Palmerston had sat with 76.

It was all delightful. With expressions of pleasure and regard they parted. Made to feel by comparison a fresh youth of fifty-eight, the Unionist leader drove away declaring "the old man is incomparable", and pondered the course of fate which had compelled him to be an antagonist and a victor. They met once more, and most amicably, at Cannes six months later, but after that never again.

V

At first the House of Commons felt Mr. Gladstone's retirement as a solemn and irreparable loss, but in the odd way of mankind, members soon found themselves getting accustomed to do without him, and went on as though even he never had been.

None the less, as between leading personalities in the House proportions were altered. The strongest figure now left in Parliament and public life was Chamberlain himself. Speaker Peel, we may remember, judged him to be the best parliamentarian next to Gladstone, and with no exception the best debater. A few days before the Dollis Hill interview, Nestor himself, judging men dispassionately in his retirement, remarked to Sir Algernon West that "After Cobden and Bright, Chamberlain was the finest specimen of the Reformed Parliament".² If without Bright's oratorical gift, he was supreme in the sustained

¹ This must have been nearly seventy years before.

² *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, p. 296. (July 29, 1894, the day after Chamberlain's visit to Dollis

Hill). Speaking to others at this time, Gladstone called Chamberlain "the most remarkable man of his generation."

BOOK

X.

1894.

terseness, clearness and force of his own style, lending itself to all parliamentary uses whether of combat or business. And as for Cobden, despite his vast influence on opinion and policy through the Victorian age, he does not in other respects come into comparison with Chamberlain either as a parliamentary figure or as an executive statesman and creative administrator.

All the rival figures of Chamberlain's earlier years in the House of Commons were removed or passing. Bright and Parnell, too, were gone; Hartington reduced to a dukedom in another place; Lord Randolph sinking to death; as for Goschen, still respected and cogent, he had shown his limits, and his future was behind him. Dilke, though in the House again, never recovered his old influence; his method though informative was dull. Harcourt, about to assert himself with surprising massiveness in his life's disappointment when Rosebery became Premier, was more formidable to his colleagues than to his opponents. Everyone knew by now that John Morley, with all his distinction of phrasing, never would command. Asquith was not yet recognised as a ready debater despite his classical quality at notice. Grey and Lloyd George were not yet amongst the foremost. One younger man than Chamberlain was also a most brilliant debater on his occasions. Arthur Balfour was rising in all men's view. But his high gifts were not those of a captain of men. In dominant power of personality Chamberlain was first in the House of Commons after Gladstone vanished.

We must hasten the record of confused months up to the downfall of Liberalism and a change of Government raising the fighting leader of Unionist democracy to a third and greater stage of his career. For Gladstone's successors Chamberlain, it must be admitted, was without pity or compunction. It did not take him many days to see that the exclusion of Harcourt from the Premiership would prove to be the capital stroke of Liberal misfortunes. Exerting as never before his will and abilities alike, Harcourt was resolved to be master if not Premier.

Lord Rosebery entered upon his dismal task—a peer called upon to lead a campaign against the House of Lords and treated as a cipher in the House of Commons. Unfairly placed, what slender chances were his he extinguished by allowing himself to

be unstrung at the outset. On taking office he pledged himself to Home Rule—and the same evening he declared what all his colleagues believed and what his supporters in the Press had been proclaiming, that Home Rule could not be carried until England was converted to it, an event known to be improbable in that generation. For one thing, by this confession, Gladstone's successor vindicated the constitutional position of the Peers whom it was his supposed function to assail. For another thing, the Irish vote in the House held this Government not so much in the hollow of its hand as between finger and thumb. Instantly a Nationalist and Radical revolt seemed for a moment to throw the new Government upon derisive Unionist assistance. But then, under strict Irish surveillance, the new Premier went to Edinburgh on St. Patrick's Day. There he explained himself away.

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

Chamberlain, in his element, teased the Government unmercifully in the House. Whatever, he said, the new Prime Minister's private convictions might be, circumstances would prove too strong for him. Impressions of hieroglyphics in Egypt were called "squeezes"; Lord Rosebery's policy was a "squeeze" of Gladstone's. In vain Labouchere "went about with his lantern looking for an honest Radical". But this was not the first time that *Truth* had been left at the bottom of a well. Home Rule was retained, but it was also put on the shelf, and no one knew when it would be taken down again. This would be a case as in *Alice in Wonderland* of "jam yesterday and jam to-morrow but never jam to-day".¹ Next day, when the Government on the Address ate humble pie by invoking Unionists to save them from their nominal supporters, he asked them how long they meant to evade the judgment of the country.

A few days later he followed Lord Rosebery at Edinburgh and answered from the same platform. He pursued his favourite system, caricaturing the competing items of the Newcastle programme and representing contradictions as chaos. Rosebery's plight reminded him of a custom amongst a certain savage tribe. When they had to deal with a malingering debtor they tied a tiger to his door and kept it there until he paid. It was what the Irish party had done to the Prime Minister, who

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xxii. (March 13, 1894).

BOOK when the tiger roared vowed to pay. Then he epitomised the
 X. new situation in as witty a passage of its kind as he ever
 1894. delivered:

We have now a Prime Minister who is willing to support Home Rule though he has no firm belief in its early success. He is willing to dis-establish one Church or to establish three, as may be most convenient. He is willing to abolish the House of Lords, even at the cost of revolution, although he is himself in favour of a Second Chamber. . . . In Mr. Gladstone at any rate we had a man who succeeded in convincing himself before he tried to convince others. But Lord Rosebery is not convinced; and he does not seem to think that anyone needs conviction. Mr. Gladstone was one of whom it was sometimes said that his earnestness ran away with his judgment; but Lord Rosebery allows his judgment to be run away with by the earnestness of other people.

This was one of the gayest of all his taunting speeches, and in the long newspaper reports "cheers", "laughter", "great laughter" mark nearly every sentence.¹ The Premier then undertook a chilly pilgrimage to Birmingham of all places. There he denounced the idol of that city. To what Chamberlain called "petty recrimination and hysterical invective", the Radical Unionist replied promptly at Bradford and made a mass meeting joyous.² The *Yorkshire Post* described:

A speech of faultless literary finish was delivered without a moment's hesitation for a word . . . without the recall of a syllable already uttered. . . . His voice and nerve were under perfect command but every vehicle of scorn and indignation was brought into play.

These platform duels continued without interrupting altogether the social intercourse of statesmen.

There are some interesting pages in the irregular diary:

ROSEBERY, MORLEY AND CHAMBERLAIN

June 30, 1894.—At the dinner given by the Prince of Wales to the Archduke of Austria I had a remarkable conversation with Rosebery and afterwards with John Morley. Rosebery began the conversation, and we got to the Congo agreement. He said that the French had not a leg to stand upon, and that he would never give way to them. . . . From this we passed to the change made in the political situation by the intro-

¹ Edinburgh, March 22, 1894.

² Bradford, June 2, 1894.

duction of the [first] Home Rule Bill. . . . He reminded me of his action in the Cabinet of 1885 when National Councils were discussed, and said he had supported me then because he believed—as he did still—that some kind of extended local government might be given to England and Scotland as well as to Ireland. . . . I said that in 1885 we all talked of Home Rule without clear ideas of what it meant. It had not then been defined.

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

He said it was just the same now. I expressed surprise and he said: "Where has it been defined?" I said that I thought the Leader of the Liberal party had brought in two Bills in 1886 and 1893, and that these must be taken as the definition of Home Rule in the future. He said, "Not a bit of it; they do not commit us"—or words to that effect. Then he referred to the Cabinet of 1886 and to my resignation. He said, "I have always thought that you ought not to have been allowed to go. We had been told beforehand that you were irreconcilable, but I was struck by your evident anxiety not to break up the party, and I believe that our differences might have been arranged. . . ."

Afterwards John Morley said that he supposed he was the only person remaining in the Cabinet who sincerely believed in Home Rule, that he had the lowest opinion of the Foreign Office, and that the Congo agreement had been grossly mismanaged. . . . In the course of the conversation he made indirect allusion to disputes with Harcourt. It is clear that they are not a happy family.

VI

We cannot attend on Chamberlain from platform to platform or follow him through a wilderness of controversy. A hundred issues were in dispute together. Discussion was a futile pretence, so far as it affected to turn upon the merits or demerits of this or that measure or proposition. Nothing mattered but the question of when the election would come and what it would decide. As he went from one large town to another his visits were an enlivenment in advance. When he appeared, his effect was to fire his dense audiences with confident eagerness for the electoral form of ordeal by battle.

Needless to say, he was the target for all arrows from the other side. The Ministerial or semi-Ministerial sections and factions, if more or less discordant upon everything else, were at least convergent against him. To convict him of every kind of

BOOK X.
1894. heresy and apostasy, the Newcastle programme was employed as a sort of Athanasian Creed under every article whereof he had incurred damnation.

The best way to show the variety of his combats and interventions is to take separately the different grounds of action.

Ireland after 1893.—He stood at all costs for bringing Gladstonian Home Rule to final downfall. He was still for Irish County Councils, but could not go beyond them now without splitting the Unionist ranks and defeating himself on the main issue. This he was too strong a man to do. Every move on both sides now was tactical. In 1894, accordingly, the Evicted Tenants Bill was rejected like most Ministerial attempts at legislation. As Chief Secretary, John Morley, anxious for a compromise, sought a personal interview with Chamberlain, who advised him to make the Bill a voluntary measure. "Later in the afternoon Balfour and I saw him together. . . . It was agreed that Morley would consult his Irish friends and see if they would allow him to make the Bill voluntary."¹ The Nationalists forbade. On the Irish Land Bill in the following session Chamberlain for his part rightly declared once more what Parnell had held from the first—that "the only final solution of this land question will be some system of transfer of ownership from the landlord to the tenant".² In what tangles and meshes had the Ministerialists involved themselves by refusing to recognise the present hopelessness of their Irish policy and to work for compromise. He had long predicted to them that they would come to something like this impasse. Harder than ever was his view that from the beginning of the disruption the folly had been on their side not his. What they called "recantation" was resistance. Resistance, as since 1886, on the only lines that could make it victorious. To ask him to fall into ambush on every subsidiary issue and to behave as a wavering politician, was knocking at the wrong door.

Democratic Finance.—Owing to the rising needs of sea-power, and to the demands of the Admiralty, as most Liberals put it, there was to be met a deficit of £4,500,000—"a vast deficit", according to the ideas of those days. In proposing the reform of the death-duties, Harcourt came to a vital point. Was all

¹ Chamberlain's Occasional Diary, July 26, 1894.

² Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xxxii. (April 4, 1895).

property to be taxed at the same rate? His opinion was that if applied with moderation and judgment the principle of graduated taxation was most equitable and politic. Chamberlain neither aided nor countenanced the elaborate and partly prescient opposition to the great, far-reaching Budget of 1894. He stood firm for his old principle of graduated taxation. During Committee in June he refused to vote against that principle and separated himself from the mass of Conservatives.¹ From neither side for this independence could he earn thanks. He had the fibre to do without them.

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

Harrowing as were the new death-duties to the minds of wealthy, and especially landed, Conservatives, the Budget was bound to pass. The Unionist masses were indifferent to it. No danger to the Unionist position proper was involved.

The Electoral System.—For the Opposition he wound up the debate on the Registration Bill with his usual vigour. The conditions no doubt were “a scandal”. But the Government, instead of seeking real remedy, were manipulating the scandal for partisan advantage. When they struck at over-representation by plural voting of individuals chiefly Unionist, why did they spare the over-representation of Nationalist Ireland? In view of a General Election, the Bill was a plain attempt “to pack the jury of the nation”.² All proceedings now were a business of preparing for the polls. To that end, through the Parliament of 1892–95 he was much the ablest in strategy and manœuvre.

London Government.—Always in favour of fighting municipal elections on party lines as the best means of rousing interest and attracting ability, he was besieged to lend his aid to municipal Unionism in London as in Birmingham. He consented. The Moderates came near to success. The Progressives, hitherto holding an easy supremacy, had to fight for their lives and saved themselves by a hair's-breadth. He was now accused of repudiating the municipal principles which had been the breath of his being.

Mr. Lionel Holland left on record a lively note of the circumstances. Young Unionism had to overcome the prejudice of Old Conservatism before Chamberlain was invited to intervene in

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xxv. (Commander Bethell's Amendment, June 4, 1894).

² *Annual Register* (1894), p. 103 (May 4); Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xxiv. (May 4, 1894).

BOOK
X.
1894.

the metropolitan struggle. He consented on condition "that nothing will be done to whittle away the popular side of your programme". Mr. Holland tells the sequel:

When the next London County Council election came along it changed a wretched Moderate minority into an exact equality with Progressive representation on the Council. The chief force and feature of the campaign was the speech of Mr. Chamberlain to an immense audience in the East End.¹

That speech, at Stepney on February 6, 1895, was the climax of the contest on the eve of the voting. It was the rapid fire of aggressive phrases, but his main argument reiterated the opinion he had maintained always. He thought the metropolis too enormous to be ruled with the highest efficiency by one central body. He held that had the metropolitan boroughs been created earlier and given more power, the Birmingham ideals, in respect of housing and reconstruction schemes, would have been better promoted.

No doubt this was a view as questionable as energetic, but it was no cynical perversion. He was convinced altogether that sufficient civic enthusiasm for London as a whole could not be made to exist, so diverse in situation and circumstance were its districts; and that an undue degree of habitual apathy would be the result of jumbling all these districts together. His defence of the City Corporation was of another kind. There alone he was frankly conservative and hereditary. He had it in his bones.

Welsh Disestablishment.—This question caused him more difficulty than any other. To prevent it from becoming a real peril to the Unionist alliance taxed all his resources. Conservatives were outraged by his Nonconformist opinions; Liberals reviled his refusal to jeopardise the Union for the sake of that or any other subsidiary issue. On the principle he stuck to his guns. Chamberlain never, at any time, disavowed the ideal of disestablishment, but he held that Gladstone and the Nonconformists, in 1886 and after, had destroyed it as a practical possibility for England. None the less, in 1891 he courted Conservative censure by voting for Welsh Disestablishment. In 1893

¹ Communicated to the present writer.

he told the Bishop of Salisbury that disestablishment would be best for the life and interests of the Church itself. At the end of January 1895 he wrote privately to the editor of the *Aberystwyth Observer*:

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

Disestablishment in Wales must come, and the only question is whether it shall be accompanied by a just treatment of the Church in regard to its funds. This can be secured now by the Unionist party.

The revelation of this letter roused another Conservative outcry. The Bishop of St. Asaph called to say that the disclosure had not done a ha'porth of harm. Chamberlain repeated that the Unionists should settle the thing on fair terms—"Whereas if it were left, some day or other the Gladstonians would get their chance and would show no mercy". "The Bishop said he fully believed that if the Church were independent it would gain many supporters from the Nonconformists and would be stronger than at present."¹

In that session of 1895, Asquith introduced the Welsh Bill. Gladstone was known to abhor it. He cancelled his pair. He thought of reappearing at Westminster in commination of sacrilege. The fall of Lord Rosebery's Government put an end to the Bill. But to the intense anger of the Conservatives in the lump, Chamberlain voted for the Second Reading.² Only one Liberal Unionist supported him in the lobby; but fifteen of his ordinary following abstained from the division. Moral courage could not have gone further. In that bleakness of isolation few leaders would have risked as much.

It is amusing to record on this subject that Chamberlain in January 1895 had a last and a sympathetic talk with Mr. Gladstone at Cannes. Afterwards he wrote to *The Times* advising generous terms for the Welsh Church.

The Bishop of St. Asaph³ was a close friend of Chamberlain's, and describes the sequel:

The Welsh Bill was introduced on Feb. 25th and the second reading began on March 21st. Two days after Mr. Gladstone returned from the South of France. A telegram from Mr. Chamberlain brought me up to London on Monday March 28th. The intermediaries suggested had failed,

¹ Chamberlain's Occasional Diary,
April 17, 1894.

² April 1, 1895.

³ Archbishop of Wales since 1920.

BOOK

X

1894.

and it was decided that I as Bishop of the diocese should ask Mr. Gladstone for an interview. This with his usual kindness and courtesy was granted, and on the following morning Mr. Gladstone saw me at 4 Whitehall Court, where he was staying. At that moment the Welsh Bill was under discussion and I pointed out the most wounding and crippling provisions in the Bill. Mr. Gladstone listened with patience. "You know, Bishop," he said, "I am as far as politics are concerned dead." "Yes, Sir," I replied. "You may be dead in politics but you are not dead in England." As I got up to leave Mr. Gladstone said, "What provisions in the Bill, Bishop, hurt you most?" I said at once the secularization of our Cathedrals and the taking away of our churchyards. Mr. Gladstone had paired with the Right Honourable C. P. Villiers and some time before the Cathedral question came up Mr. Gladstone had withdrawn his pair. The Government Whip, a Welshman [Tom Ellis], had for weeks kept this withdrawal secret. You will see in the *Life of Sir William Harcourt*, vol. ii. p. 362, a letter from Sir William to Lord Rosebery on the 19th of June in which Sir William said: "This affair of Mr. Gladstone's pair respecting which I never heard a word till I read it in *The Times* this morning is so serious that I must ask to see you about it to-morrow morning".

But on the next day, June 20th, the Government were defeated and resigned.¹

VII

Chamberlain's position as an advocate of public regulation of the liquor traffic was as plain as any man's. Harcourt pushed on his Local Veto Bill, to Rosebery's despair. This measure allowed voters by a majority to reduce the number of public-houses or suppress them altogether. There was to be no compensation for the extinction of licences. A Liberal historian, Mr. Paul, has described this scheme as "perhaps the most unpopular measure ever brought into the House of Commons".² In the circumstances of the day, it prejudiced temperance reform, and discredited the Government.

They were suspected of using every issue as a stalking-horse for Home Rule or as a snare for the Peers. Our country, by the nature of its faults and qualities, distrusts complicated policies, and dislikes having to deal with more than one thing at

¹ The Archbishop of Wales to the present writer, May 3, 1927.

² *History of Modern England*, vol. v. p. 263.

a time. Prevailing opinion in Great Britain was now both bored and baited by having so many measures together thrown at its head. Its obstinate desire was at the first chance to rid itself of this Government. Denying the sincerity of the Local Veto proposals and convinced of their ineptitude, Chamberlain flouted and scouted the Bill. Consequently he was lampooned as a former apostle of temperance who had become the friend of brewers and publicans, as of parsons and peers. What of it?

CHAP.
XLVI.
ÆT. 58.

Throughout his parliamentary life he had believed the temperance party to be on the wrong road. They were frustrating the purpose of restricting drink by their mania for punishing publicans. His criterion was not logic but sense. Buying out the liquor interest he held not less advisable than buying out slaveholding. He was just as much convinced as when, nearly twenty years earlier, he preached his Gothenburg system, that the right way in this country was to abolish private profit from drink; to remove all inducements to push the sale; to substitute public monopoly and disinterested management; to improve ordinary facilities but with every guarantee for decency. There is no doubt that on this question he understood far better than anyone else the temperament of the English people. Given compensation, public ownership, and abolition of profit from alcohol, Chamberlain in all other respects would have empowered localities to do what they liked with the trade.

In his annual address to his constituents in the autumn of 1894 he remarked pithily of Harcourt's adherents, "These people are more anxious to punish the publican than to reclaim the drunkard . . . and so nothing is done".¹ He went on to contend that local veto was bad because it looked only to continuance or suppression of licences instead of providing for regulation of the trade. The pleasures and facilities of the rich were left untouched. He found himself able to make the surprising and proud claim that Gladstone agreed with him.

At this period he was in lively correspondence with the Bishop of Chester, who fervently and vainly tried to revive the Gothenburg system. But how had it come about that he was able also to invoke a more august name? Gladstone perceived, before he resigned, that "no good Licensing Bill would pass without

¹ Birmingham Town Hall, October 11, 1894.

BOOK
X.
1894.

some sort of compensation".¹ Now, in his retirement, he eulogised the Gothenburg system and its Birmingham apostle.² A delectable exchange of opinions then occurred between two Ministers:

September 24, 1894.—Harcourt to Morley.— . . . Mr. G. has managed to make what seems to me a fatal mess of the temperance question. Does anybody believe that the real temperance people are going to accept a State traffic in drink *à la Gothenburg*? . . .

September 27.—Morley to Harcourt.— . . . I don't wonder that you should feel some disgust at Mr. G.'s temperance manifesto. That he should kick over local option, after being head of a Government which ratified your Bill is really rather strong—almost as bad as Chamberlain's reproaches about the mess made by a Cabinet of which he was a member.³

Harcourt and Morley, driving their party and temperance reform to deep ruin, reprobate Gladstone and Chamberlain together for their equal good sense on licensing as on Welsh Disestablishment. The irony of political turns cannot be more curious. It was as impossible for Chamberlain to be as black as he was painted as for Thurlow to be as wise as he looked. Lord Morley lived to pass out of a false mood, and made at last magnanimous amends⁴ to the repute of one who, though an intense partisan like others at this distasteful period, was not worse than the rest but only stronger.

This episode shows how the unique "special pleader" or Devil's Advocate, as they variously called him, was always on trial for his moral life. Chamberlain was too sure of himself and of the immediate future to care any more about the everlasting accusations. To a being so charged with life itself, these exer-

¹ *Private Diaries of Sir Algernon West*, p. 150.

² Letter to Lord Thring quoted by the Bishop of Chester at Aberdeen, Sept. 17, 1894. Gladstone wrote that Local Option could be no more than a partial and occasional remedy, that a limitation of licences as a cure for intemperance was an imposture; he had long been convinced that the selling of liquors for public profit only, offered the sole chance of escape from the present miserable and almost contemptible predicament. He crowned all by expressing the satisfaction with

which he regarded Chamberlain's activity in promoting this particular reform. At the same time, Chamberlain's views on Welsh Church disestablishment and generous treatment were highly gratifying to Hawarden, and it seems evident that his recent visit to Dollis Hill had left a pleasing impression. But these sentiments seemed deplorable to most Gladstonians at the time.

³ Gardiner's *Harcourt*, vol. ii. p. 307.

⁴ Morley, *Recollections* (1917), vol. i. pp. 151 seq.

cises in verbiage were of small account. Wasting no breath on apologetics, he addressed himself wholly to further matters of action.

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

VIII

Another historic thing had to be done. The Unionist alliance must be placed on a basis of more explicit understanding in order that, after the coming Liberal defeat, a Coalition Government might be formed with a view to long tenure of power.

Chamberlain addressed himself more freely to the Conservative rank and file. It was no new thing for him to support their candidates and sway their audiences. More frequently and familiarly he did both from the beginning of 1894. At the house-dinner of the Edgbaston Club, Birmingham, he regaled the members (January 30). He told them that he had finished with the "new Radicals" under the leadership of Harcourt—formerly "Dugald Dalgetty", the "Chameleon", the "Vicar of Bray", but recently nicknamed the *Bombastes Furioso* of the "multifarious programme". "They are never satisfied with making anybody happy now unless at the same time they can make somebody else unhappy." "I am, and shall be in the future, proud to call myself a Unionist, and be satisfied with that title alone, believing it is a wider and nobler title than that either of Conservative or Liberal, since it includes them both—since it includes all men who are determined to maintain an undivided Empire, and who are ready to promote the welfare and the union not of one class, but of all classes of the community."

On this text of Empire and social progress, and more national unity for the sake of both, his public speeches were delivered up to the General Election. He was heard in the Midlands and in the North—at Bradford, Liverpool, Leeds, at Durham city, at Heywood in Lancashire, at St. James's Hall in London. Everywhere his effect was like a driving-wheel. His audiences went away longing to work as well as cheer. He made everyone feel that they wanted to do something.

As to the Peers, he wished their hereditary composition reformed, but a strong Second Chamber was essential, and failing a better he would "stick to the House of Lords". When he had said, a decade before, that they must bend or break, they

BOOK X.
1894. were resisting the will of the people; now, he put it, they were insisting like himself that the real will of the people should prevail.

On social reform he had defined his proposals in the well-known article in the *Nineteenth Century*.¹ "In social questions the Conservatives have always been more progressive than the Liberals, and in their latest legislation have only returned to the old Tory traditions." He cited many instances, from the early factory acts to free education. In repeated addresses he appealed for old-age pensions, inviting the assistance of the friendly societies and urging that this greatest of social reforms should be treated as a national question and lifted above party quarrels. "All I want is to lay down and get accepted certain broad principles of State action, and when that is done, the details must be left either to a Royal Commission appointed expressly for the purpose, or, as I should think much better, to a department of the State which would have access to the best actuarial advice and experience."² On this subject, he steadily deepened the impression he had begun to create some years before: "The existing state of things is a scandal to our civilisation".³

His fullest exposition of his views on social and labour questions was his annual address to his constituents in the autumn of 1894. He insisted again that the one true key to temperance reform was public management with the abolition of private profit from drink. For the better housing of the people much more must be done in the spirit of the legislation under Lord Beaconsfield's Government. That advance, we recollect, was extolled by him at the time when Mayor of Birmingham. Artisans should be aided to own their dwellings. His plea for courts of conciliation in labour disputes—for arbitration as a remedy for industrial warfare—was confirmed presently by the Report of the Labour Commission. He renews his support of an eight-hours day for miners and sympathises in the same spirit with other workers exceptionally tasked. Shopkeepers should be urged to reduce excessive hours. Free influx of destitute aliens, lowering the working-class standard of life at home, should no

¹ November 1892.

1894.

² Birmingham Town Hall, Address to Friendly Societies, December 6,

³ Liberal Unionist Conference, Portsmouth, April 2, 1891.

longer be allowed. As for employers' liability, he reasserted that the rejected Ministerial Bill was niggling or retrograde, that the victims of industrial accidents must be regarded as "the wounded soldiers of industry". Every day strengthened his conviction that compensation must be universal. "In my opinion—not now for the first time expressed—the cost of every accident in every employment is rightly a first charge on the cost of production." "The Government of to-day . . . is, or ought to be, an organised expression of the wishes and the wants of the whole people of this country; and as such we may fairly call upon it to leave off these perpetual constitutional experiments and to use its vast resources and its great influence to promote some practical measures to secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number."

CHAP.
XLVI.
Æt. 58.

Throughout he refused to separate his Imperial views from his social ideas. British employment, restricted more and more by foreign tariffs, would expand with the Empire. Otherwise, there was no assurance that the world's request for British goods and labour would keep pace with the growth of our population. Let prosperity and power advance together, each force helping the other.¹

IX

Attacked from all sides at once—and bitterly by Conservative *frondeurs*—once more he was made to feel that he carried his life in his hand. To an idealising individualist like Auberon Herbert he was sunk in "carnality"—probably with some sort of a soul at the bottom of him. Referring in one of his cheaper phrases to Welsh Disestablishment, he remarked that nobody would be "a penny the better" for it. Liberals, beginning themselves to offer substantial benefits for votes, travestied him the more as a coarse materialist.

Of all the strokes of malice this was the most plausible and the least fair. Had he ever been different when Radicalism praised him to the skies? Though he lacked the language of exaltation, he had his inward vision and had always followed it at any risk. "The condition of the people" had been all his life an inward appeal. Was it carnal to pursue from beginning

¹ Birmingham Town Hall, October 11, 1894.

BOOK
X.
1894.

to end the increasing prosperity, safety and happiness of the people—decent housing, fewer slums, higher earnings, less unemployment; reduced mortality and sickness; more comfort, more pleasure? Every bit of this task required grappling with material abuses. So with coffin-ships and with tropical medicine later. To cope with the concrete was his aptitude; for the expression of high sentiment without action he had no faculty. If he wanted old-age pensions and accident insurance, did he ever forget education? If he was eager for these grossly material things, baths or wash-houses, did he forget libraries, museums, art galleries, parks or provincial universities? We must not disguise that his words were often below his deeds. The deeds of many glowing moralists in politics were and are much more below their words.

The humour of it was that many Conservatives by a different road arrived at the same conclusion as the Radicals. He was certainly a materialist, pandering to the selfish interest of the working classes instead of adhering to our traditional spiritual practice of leaving affluent persons to do what they liked with their own. Were the devil left still to take the hindmost the poor would think more earnestly of God. W. E. Henley's young men in the *New Review* attacked him in another way as a demagogue who ought to be cast out of the tabernacle of Toryism. His influence over the Conservative masses and on Conservative policy was dreaded and detested by these malcontents; many of whom, it must be added in fairness, most estranged by his views on Welsh Disestablishment, regarded him as a dangerous dissenter prowling in the orthodox fold.

As late as the spring of 1895, high Tory ideas and low Tory obstinacy threatened disaster to Unionist prospects just when all other considerations promised triumph. We shall see that Chamberlain, in utter disgust, vowed to throw off the misery of politics on these terms. For a moment it seemed as near a thing as the Duke described to Mr. Creevey. Exerting their whole authority over their party, the Conservative leaders quelled the revolt. A few months more brought a total change of regime and created a system of Government more solid and prolonged than had been known in Queen Victoria's reign, whose epoch it for some time survived.

CHAPTER XLVII

FALL OF THE ROSEBERY GOVERNMENT— CHAMBERLAIN COLONIAL SECRETARY

(1894–1895)

UNIONIST Leaders prepare to form a Joint Administration—Chamberlain's Terms—A Conservative Mutiny and the Leamington Split—Black News from the Bahamas—Chamberlain nearly retires from Public Life—A Desperate Crisis—The Mutiny quelled—The "Unionist Party" Solidly Established—Unpopularity and Ruin of Gladstone's Successors—Some Changes in National Life—Cromwell's Statue and the Cordite Surprise—Lord Rosebery falls—End of Gladstonian Home Rule—Lord Salisbury Prime Minister—Chamberlain Colonial Secretary—The General Election of 1895 and the New Epoch.

I

EXTRAORDINARY to say—what could be more so?—Chamberlain in very truth seriously contemplated total withdrawal from public life, just a few months before he became one of the most powerful Ministers of his epoch. Before we come to that little-known episode, other concerns must be narrated. They were of profound influence in shaping the later and greater stages of his career.

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

In the inner councils of the Unionist alliance, negotiations were in course for a common policy and a joint administration. Soon after Gladstone's retirement, when all men's eyes were turned from the past to the future, Sir Michael Hicks Beach at Bristol avowed his frank hope that in the next Government the Duke of Devonshire would be found sitting by the side of Lord Salisbury and Mr. Chamberlain by the side of Mr. Balfour. Suggestions in this sense were repeated on Conservative platforms.

BOOK
X.
1894.

The Radical Unionist was not so easy. Some thankless realities he recognised too well. He knew that against his plaguy heresies, grumbling amongst old Tories was even more deep than loud, and that young Tories of the superior sort were creating amongst the select social and literary cliques—not only of one party—more mischief at his expense than appeared on the surface. In Birmingham and around, Conservative feeling kicked against the over-representation of Liberal Unionism in the Midlands. For long, Chamberlain did not feel sanguine that he could bring the Conservative leaders to such progressive terms in domestic affairs as would enable him to become their associate in any joint administration. Except upon specific assurances in that sense, he was determined not to accept office. Rather he surmised that as from 1886 to 1892 he would have greater power in an independent capacity than as a Minister, and this time his terms would be much higher.

A Royal impulse—fortunately withdrawn from public knowledge for very many years—compelled the Unionist leaders of both sections to come to closer quarters with the question of their future responsibilities and relationships.

Lord Rosebery was about to open his public campaign against the House of Lords.

It is the greatest issue that has been put in this country since your fathers resisted the tyranny of Charles I. and James II. . . . We fling down the gauntlet. It is for you to back us up.

This proclamation was made at Bradford on October 27. But the Prime Minister confessed two things, and implied a third. The difficulties in the way of reform were enormous. He was a Second Chamber man. This might mean a stronger assembly. His Radicals, on the contrary, wanted to enfeeble the House of Lords, not reform it. They desired a crippled Second Chamber, whether hereditary or not. The Government, said the Bradford speech, proposed to proceed by way of solemn resolution in the House of Commons before asking the people for a mandate to cope with the Peers.

II

Aware beforehand of this intention, than which none could have been more innocuous in the atmosphere of the time, Queen Victoria was thrown into a paroxysm of alarm. She contemplated the extreme course—far more revolutionary than Lord Rosebery's—of forcing her Ministers to a dissolution before they could arouse serious agitation in the country against the hereditary House.¹

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

Her Majesty put a preliminary question to Lord Salisbury. Was the Unionist party "fit for a dissolution *now*"? Next the constitutional advice of Sir Henry James was sought from Balmoral. The eminent Liberal Unionist lawyer suggested in his memorandum that the action imagined by the sovereign—amounting in effect to the dismissal of a Liberal Government—could not assist the Peers but might shake the monarchy. Sir Henry James, already allowed to consult the Duke of Devonshire, now asked and received permission to inform as fully his other principal colleague:

Chamberlain is my parliamentary leader. If he learns from an outside source what has taken place and knows that the Duke and I have kept so important a matter back from him, I fear he may be somewhat angry.²

Needless to say, Chamberlain wholly approved the advice dissuading the Crown from partisan action. He wrote down his comment on the circumstances and came to a pungent conclusion.

THE CROWN AND DISSOLUTION

November 10, 1894.—The Queen asked James through Ponsonby whether she was constitutionally entitled to order a Dissolution, and failing consent of Rosebery to dismiss the Government.

James in reply distinguished between constitutional theory and policy. In theory the Crown has undoubted right to dismiss a Ministry. Technically, Crown has no right to order Dissolution but may dismiss without reason given after having ascertained that Ministry will not dissolve.

¹ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Third Series, vol. ii. pp. 430-448 (October 25 to November 12, 1894). See also *Lord James of Hereford*, pp. 231-233, and Lord Crewe's *Rosebery*, vol. ii. pp. 461-464.

² To Sir Henry Ponsonby, November 6, 1894.

In present case the question is whether it is expedient to dismiss the Ministry.

Their policy of attack on House of Lords is an utter failure. They are daily growing weaker, and they have no power to carry anything of an extreme or dangerous character through both Houses. Is it not wise to give them rope—rather than allow them to introduce a new issue and to pose as the victims of an unusual exercise of the authority of the Crown?

The Duke of Devonshire agreed with James's views.

I also agreed.

The time for such exercise of authority—if ever—was after the defeat of Home Rule Bill. Then the Crown might have said—"We will not allow you to divert the issue. We insist on consulting the people at once as to this great constitutional change." Even then it would have been of doubtful expediency as it might have raised a new issue and brought the Crown into political conflict. But the apparent justification would have been the fear that the Gladstonian policy of introducing new issues might have been successful in confusing the mind of the people and preventing a clear verdict on a vital question.

Now there is no fear. The Gladstonians have done their best and failed.

The Crown should certainly not interfere unless in the last resort. A man ought not to throw himself from a three-storey window until a fire in the house is actually singeing his coat tails.¹

The last sentence was Chamberlain's remark to himself and not suitable for communication in august quarters. But it shows how strongly he felt. Sir Henry James was able to report in a few days that there was no further question at Court of ideas as disserviceable to the Unionist party as dangerous to the future of the throne.

III

This disquieting episode had one good effect. The Conservative and Liberal Unionist leaders were brought sharply face to face with a question not yet thoroughly discussed between them. It might become urgent any day, and almost assuredly would become vital before the end of another session. How was an alternative Government to be framed?

¹ Chamberlain Papers. Note in Chamberlain's handwriting.



1894

WINDING 'EM UP

Reproduced from the original drawing by Sir John Tenniel for the cartoon appearing in *Punch*, October 27, 1894, by kind permission of the Proprietors

It was of little avail for judicious Conservatives to advocate in general terms what an earlier age would have called a broad-bottomed administration. Extolling Coalition could not create it. Upon what basis of common policy were the two Unionist sections to come together? For Chamberlain that was the crucial question. Unless a satisfactory answer were given he would stand out. Yes, even if the Duke of Devonshire and Sir Henry James—whose own inclination he had not the least desire to hinder—decided to take office apart from him. On the other hand, it was evident to every capable politician that any conceivable Unionist administration without him would not be half as secure in the House as with him, while in the country he was as strong in popular appeal as all the other Unionist statesmen put together.

Lord Salisbury, for his own part, was ready at any moment to accept the responsibility of replacing Lord Rosebery. Most required was franker communication than hitherto between the Conservative leader and the Radical Unionist.

At the end of October 1894, immediately after a patrician Premier challenged his order, Chamberlain sent to Lord Salisbury a very long and very shrewd document—"Memorandum of a Programme of Social Reforms".¹ In his covering letter he pointed out that the House of Lords as composed was an institution not admitting of complete defence; and suggested that the hereditary legislators had an ideal opportunity of strengthening themselves by bringing forward next session an unprecedented array of beneficent measures. Why should not the House of Lords excel the House of Commons in promoting social reform? Chamberlain throws out this suggestion as a matter of course, and seems unconscious, as he often was, of his own innate audacity. With him Danton's *toujours* had become too much a matter of course to be mentioned.

In addition to the projects of reform familiar to us from his speeches in the early 'nineties, he anticipates ideas not to be realised until years afterwards, and then by the other side. For instance Labour Exchanges. "A separate Bill might, I think, be introduced to provide for the establishment of Labour Bureaux for exchange of information as to the state

¹ Chamberlain to Salisbury, October 29, 1894.

BOOK
X.
1894.

of employment in different trades and districts." In connection with new housing legislation, the railway companies should be pressed to provide cheap trains for workmen, so as to enable them to make their homes in more open air, while remaining within easy reach of their centres of employment. He attributes high importance to his proposal for enabling artisans to become owners of their dwellings. Jesse Collings's Bill for technical instruction in agricultural districts he warmly commends. "Elementary schools of the kind desired, with land attached and opportunities of instruction available for allotment holders and small tenants, exist all over the Continent and appear to be highly successful." A serious attempt, voluntary at first, should be made to diminish strikes by Courts of Arbitration. As for practical temperance reform as against Harcourt's Local Veto, why not municipal ownership according to his Gothenburg system, as newly advocated by the Bishop of Chester and blessed by Gladstone? Above all, regarding a full system of compensation to workmen for accidents, he insists it is "most desirable in the interests of the Unionist party that this question should be finally settled".

As to old-age pensions, since the Royal Commission has not yet reported, it is wiser to defer attempt to legislate. But the other subjects would constitute "a large and generous programme". "I need hardly point out how greatly the strategic effect of any policy of this kind would be increased by the cumulative influence which would be gained by dealing not merely with one or two isolated questions, but with a great number of important points forming together a complete scheme of reform which would be likely to appeal to the popular imagination."

The Conservative leader's breath must have been taken away when he received this heroic scheme for popularising the House of Lords against Liberal agitation. Lord Salisbury took a week or so to consider. Then his long counter-memorandum was a masterpiece of amicable elusiveness. Out of the whole programme he was inclined to restrict himself for the present to artisans' dwellings and industrial arbitration. "Fortunately time does not press." The Rosebery Government, after all, would meet Parliament again in the following February. Until the prospects of the new session could be better estimated, it

would be imprudent to bind the House of Lords to a programme. At the same time he was friendly in tone and did not base himself upon objections in principle to this—as we may call it—“Birmingham Programme for the House of Lords”. With respect to seven of the nine proposals, they all, said the Conservative leader, “seem to me salutary in themselves, and any difficulties are purely difficulties of strategy” (November 9, 1894).

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

At least this held open the door to progress. The Radical Unionist writes again to Salisbury and keeps up the pressure. He strengthens his representations by the arguments of an old electioneering hand:

TO SALISBURY

November 15, 1894.— . . . If as I think is almost certain, a dissolution should bring back the Unionist party to power they will be immediately confronted with the necessity of producing a positive programme. . . . Elections are carried by the shifting vote of a minority, who do not strictly belong to either party. The working classes are not divided on party lines as absolutely as the middle and upper classes, and my experience is that very large numbers do not actually make up their minds till the time of election comes round and are then very much influenced, by the issues presented to them at the moment. Gladstonianism has been a failure. If Unionism or Conservatism gives them the promise of better results they will come over in large numbers and turn a small into a sweeping majority.

Excellent prophecy, as next summer would prove. With still more freedom, Chamberlain urged his views on the Duke of Devonshire, insisting that all the real interest of the masses now was in social questions and that the rise of the Independent Labour party foreshadowed the weakening of the old Liberalism. Goschen was still rather a “skeleton at the feast” in these matters, but Balfour’s progressive tendencies were a more influential factor and nourished Chamberlain’s great liking for him. Vigilant judges were already forming the opinion that the good relations between these two would be one of the best influences on the future.

IV

Chamberlain sees, however, as always at his pinches, that dilatory amiabilities will not do and that he must risk bolder

BOOK
X.
1894.

stipulation. He resolves that he will not join a Government under Lord Salisbury unless ambiguity is excluded and his due influence explicitly ensured. Through one whom he knows to have the best means of communication in all important quarters he lays down the necessary terms of a coalition between Hatfield and Highbury:

CONDITIONS OF A FUTURE UNIONIST GOVERNMENT

December 11, 1894.—To Sir Henry James.—If a Unionist Government is to be formed, my personal inclinations would lead me to stay outside in an independent capacity—and I should not feel at all offended if some of my friends and colleagues joined without me.

But if, for any reason, it appears desirable that I should serve in a Cabinet which I assume will be formed by Lord Salisbury it is evident that I must make terms both as to policy and personnel.

On the former point, I need only say that, in my opinion, a Unionist Government should from the outset declare its settled intention to leave all questions of constitutional reform and change of machinery entirely alone for the present and to devote itself entirely to the study and prosecution of social legislation. Unfortunately the Conservative Party is weak in constructive statesmanship, but the Government must contain men capable of giving practical application to the principles on which such legislation is to be based.

The "Old Gang", as poor Randolph used to call them, are incapable of this, and there must be a considerable infusion of new blood.

Now, I wish you would take any opportunity which may arise to have a serious talk with the Duke about this matter. Is he willing to join in a subordinate capacity? What office would he take? Then, whom of our party are we bound to claim for? If we do not work together—and with a prearranged plan—we shall be taken in detail and some of us may find ourselves in a false position. The Liberal Unionist party in the House of Commons will look to us to press for a fair share of power for them—and if we are supposed to have made arrangements for ourselves alone, there will be natural discontent and perhaps some secessions.

Lord Salisbury will be overwhelmed with claims for his own party and our friends will be squeezed out unless we make their inclusion a *sine qua non*. Therefore, although there is much to be said against dividing the spoil before the victory—I think in the exceptional circumstances

of the present case, that the Duke, you, and I, may be pardoned for coming to a definite conclusion at once as to the terms—and the only terms—on which we will accept office if it is offered to us.

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

In an enclosure he enumerates a dozen Liberal Unionists who ought to be included in a joint administration and tabulates the long list of reforms with which he is publicly identified. Sir Henry James answers in high spirits: "The views expressed in your letter are mine. I will talk the matter over with 'the Dook'. I shall be at Chatsworth for the New Year." Next the reports from Chatsworth of its deliberate potentate's frame of mind were encouraging. In fact, the last of the Whigs declared at Ulverston that the future policy of Unionism must look to democratic welfare.

Chamberlain was, of course, indispensable to the combination which must soon be formed. His high terms must be conceded. Up to a few months before the General Election this was the position. The Conservative leaders fully recognised that the Liberal Unionists, owing markedly to the Birmingham group, must be given co-equal power. As in the case of the Peelites, they counted for far more than their numbers. In the early spring of 1895 all looked fair for full Unionist coalition under the strongest Cabinet for many years.

Then, like a white squall, without warning, came a crisis threatening to wreck all. Speaker Peel retired in April after a great occupation of the Chair. The contest for the succession in the House of Commons must be passed cursorily here. Lord Rosebery's Government would have accepted Leonard Courtney, a Liberal Unionist, as the fittest of men. His own party could not support him. They knew that Courtney, as the old Irish historian says, would "prove his impartiality by being unfair to his friends". The Conservatives preferred to put up their own excellent man, Sir Matthew White Ridley, narrowly beaten on a strict party vote by the Ministerial candidate, Mr. Gully.

V

The constituency made vacant by Speaker Peel's resignation was Warwick and Leamington. Liberal Unionists, as a matter of course, considered the seat theirs. With no expectation of

BOOK
X.
1894.

trouble they nominated the ex-Speaker's son, George Peel. To the amazement and dark wrath of Highbury, mutiny broke out amongst the local Conservatives. They put up a candidate of their own and swore that they would have the seat or sink it. For sundry weeks the quarrel raged. Efforts for Unionist agreement were vain. All the hoarded feeling of many old Midland Conservatives against Chamberlain came out. He was disparaged by the official organ of that party in London—the *Standard*, now dead, but then an honourable and able newspaper ranking nearest *The Times*. The little zealots of Toryism called him “a political trickster”, “a political gambler”, “a self-seeker playing for his own hand”. This was too much, coupled with the attacks from the other side. Gladstonians throughout the country, though of all colours amongst themselves, were enraptured to see Chamberlain in trouble with the Tories.

He broke out in that seldom mood when he cared nothing in the world for consequences. It was perhaps truly said at that time that of all men in public life Morley was by far the most sensitive, Rosebery next, and Chamberlain third, although by comparison with the other two his external composure was armoured. At the same time his force of retaliation was more quick and resolute and, at need, savage than theirs. To give at least two blows for one was the inmost prompting of his pugnacious nature. He thought now of launching one last devastating speech upon the unteachable part of Toryism—and then retiring from public life.

He meant it. But for his family and the good Jesse he might have done it.

To understand this violent episode and how real was the threat of Unionist catastrophe two short months before the alliance conquered at the polls and Chamberlain became Colonial Secretary, we must return to a coinciding crisis in his private affairs.

For weeks he had been passing through one of the old black moods of dejection. It was to be the last of its kind, but it was the worst since the late summer of 1887, when he had thought of quitting politics in disgust. Once more he revolted against the everlasting vexations and thwartings of a belligerent public

career; tired of almost everything outside the happiness of his private life—a little paradise to him through perverse times by comparison with the bitterness of the world.

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

Various causes, private as well as public, combined to create this mood. The arctic winter, one of the longest and hardest in recollection, had left him in a state of extreme physical depression. His wife was away for nearly two months at Cannes, where both her parents were ill, and he was never gay in her absence. The mean houses were encroaching closely on Highbury in a way he had never guessed when he first built there. This ruin of much in the beloved amenity of his surroundings he felt to the quick of his soul. And then came bad news of his costly enterprise in the Bahamas; of misfortune to other investments. This was a bruising blow. It meant, as we saw in a former chapter, that his means would henceforth be inadequate to his circumstances unless he decided—a very grave decision though he took it with a tough heart—to live on capital.

He hated in his soul the barren wrangling of politics at that period, however trenchant his own weapon in the scuffle. He contrasted bitterly the crass animosities assailing him even on the Unionist side with the calamity in his financial affairs. He had given completely to public life the abilities that would have made him a millionaire or multi-millionaire had he devoted his genius to money. Now these were his rewards. Was not that price too high? Had he not fought and wrought enough? What was his duty? Was it not his duty to return to business and rebuild his fortune for the sake of his family? These questions he debated alone in the late watches of the night. Luckily for us, however difficult for him to bear at the time, his wife's unavoidable absence was the means of securing for us some more passages of self-revelation. He wrote to her nearly every day.

The letters of the first group show his way of life and how he felt the rigorous winter:

TO HIS WIFE

February 8, 1895.—Our papers are filled with accounts of the extreme cold. The Thames is full of ice-blocks. . . . The Atlantic has been more than usually ice-bound and two of the great liners, the *Gascoigne* and the

BOOK
X.

1895.

Teutonic, are overdue, although it is said that there is no reason for anxiety.

February 8.—The Address proceeds languidly and the prospect of defeating the Government recedes from view. Their supporters hold together, and I see no chance of displacing them.

February 9.—Yellow fog. A correspondent in *The Times* says that temperatures have not been so low for fifty years. . . . I am to move the principal amendment for the Opposition. . . . I am still doubtful what line to take, but hope I shall see my way before long.

February 10.—To lunch at Lady Jeune's. . . . After lunch walked all the way home, the first bit of exercise I have had since I came to London. . . . The bitter frost continues with no sign of change, and the accounts from the country are extraordinary. There is a great deal of distress and many deaths through the cold.

February 12.—All this morning, for four mortal hours, I have been fighting in the Royal Commission [on Old-Age Pensions] and making myself as disagreeable as possible. I have told them that I will not sign their Report now, and will have a Report of my own. I have made all sorts of dark and mysterious threats as to the kind of criticism they will be subject to.

February 13.—I also have had our anniversary in mind. . . . I can never be too grateful to you for all the happiness you have brought to me and to mine. I often think that you have completed my life. . . . I have had more happiness than most, and whenever the end may come, I shall feel grateful for the past. . . . My headache of yesterday was evidently due to nerves. It almost disappeared by dinner time. I worked at my speech in the evening and slept like a top afterwards.

February 16.—Well, I got off my speech last night and I think it was a good one, though I was rather nervous about it, partly I suppose because it was so long in hand. Asquith made a very clever debating speech in reply, better than I thought he could make . . . and delighted his followers by his personal allusions to my old speeches.

February 19.—At last the thaw has come; it is a slow one at present but I hope we shall soon see the end of the frost. Curiously enough the meteorologists prophesied continual cold weather, but it was noticed that the gulls that had been on land during the whole of the frost all flew off to sea on Sunday.

February 20.—They have won Colchester [a by-election] confound them. . . . The frost is still going but extraordinarily slow. I am told that a large portion of the embankment opposite the House of Commons has fallen into the river.

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

February 20.—I am still alive! It was the worst dinner I have attended for many years. Much talk of the influenza which Robson Roose says is the old sweating sickness, one of the plagues of English history.

[*Later.*]—The meeting at Lord Salisbury's [on Indian affairs] did not produce much but was amusing. . . . We could not make any progress. No-one had any suggestions except myself and I had four. Lansdowne disposed of two, I think rightly. One which was well received I abandoned myself. . . . The fourth was bimetallism which was really Balfour's remedy, but not sufficiently understood to be adopted as a party programme. So the result is we shall have to see how the debate goes and act accordingly.

February 22.—James's motion in the House was an utter fiasco after all [Indian Cotton Duties]. He really had a poor case and Fowler's reply was triumphant. As a party we had no alternative policy and our men were from the first disinclined to vote against the Government. In the end they got a majority of 200. I did not vote.

[*Later.*]—The Bishop of St. Asaph¹ has just left me. He wants me to attend a conference in Wales and is still most friendly. He would like to make a compromise on Welsh Disestablishment in accordance with my suggestion. He fears with reason that Lord Salisbury will be obdurate.

But now with the thaw and Unionist chagrin on several scores, the blows of adverse fortune fell on his private finances, changing Chamberlain's whole outlook on life for the time. Before he had recovered from that shock the miserable split between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives opened in the by-election for Warwick and Leamington. We shall now see more closely how it menaced the whole Unionist party.

VI

Even before that crisis he startled his wife by letters telling her that his retirement from politics seemed almost inevitable.

¹ The present Archbishop of Wales.

BOOK X. For the time his "line of luck" had failed him, as the palmists
 1895. said it would some day:

TO HIS WIFE

February 22, 1895.—I find that besides the usual letters Neville has written a private one to Austen to be shown to me when I am not worried, in which he expresses the gravest anxiety as to the growth of the plants [sisal] which is not at all what he had hoped for. This is a new difficulty and the most serious of all. It seems as though everything was against us and that this last string to my bow will fail like the rest. I shall write to him not to increase the clearing but to do the best with the six thousand acres already planted. Perhaps matters will turn out better than he expects; anyway we have done our best and must bear our fate. It is hard upon him even more than upon us, and it seems as though the luck had left us entirely.

February 24.—Being Sunday there are no letters, and I have employed myself in writing my alternative report for the Old Age Commission. I am afraid it will be rather a nasty one, but Playfair and his friends have brought it on themselves and deserve no mercy. . . . Austen, who has been to Birmingham, reports snow still in shaded places. The water main has been frozen and they have had to supply the greenhouse boilers with carts. Several pipes have burst but only one did damage—I hope not to any serious extent. We have had another nice lot of orchids for the dinner-table and quantities of lilies of the valley. I am afraid we shall lose many shrubs; the Portuguese laurels and other laurels are especially seedy. The farm is very well.

February 26.—This morning I have been hard at work trying to secure as many signatures as possible for my alternative report on the Old Age Commission. By making some little sacrifice, I have already obtained seven and hope for three more. If so mine will be the report of the majority after all, which is pleasant for Playfair. He has only secured six signatures at present and perhaps he will be sorry before he has done.

The worst news about the Bahamas comes in a private letter from Neville to Austen. There is nothing to be done but wait and hope, but it is most disheartening, coming on the top of so much else that is bad. The last thing is the failure of the Canadian Pacific Railway to pay its dividend; the shares have fallen five in consequence and may, I suppose, go lower. They are thirteen lower than they were at Christmas. I well know

that you will meet any trouble of this kind as bravely as possible, but it is a constant anxiety to me, all the more that I can see nothing to be done. If we were in ordinary circumstances it would not be difficult to cut down expenses, but I do not know how to retrench without giving up London altogether. It is no use thinking about it now, we must wait and see.

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

So far from ceasing to think about it, he thought of it day and night. Two days later he is ready for exit from the political scene. The next letter from the man so soon to become Colonial Secretary is a searching soliloquy—the “To be or not to be” of these pages. There is no magic for him in the prospect of becoming Lord Salisbury’s subordinate. Had he cared to pay the price he refused to pay he would have been Prime Minister himself; and he has no sympathy with general Conservative feeling on social questions.

TO HIS WIFE

February 28.—The Government are going to take all the time after Easter, so I suppose there may be a lively debate in the House to-day. Personally I am not up to it and I doubt if I shall take any part. Nothing seems to be going on very well just now and I often wish I were out of it. After all I have done my part and I do not see many opportunities in the future. . . . I recur to my old idea, and external circumstances seem to be urging me in that direction

Why should I ruin myself, incur all this abuse and misrepresentation, only to be a subordinate member of a Cabinet with whose general policy I am not in hearty sympathy?¹ Well, these are thoughts that constantly pass through my mind, although I have not arrived at any settled conclusion. Perhaps I ought not to write about them, but if you were here I should tell you my thoughts as they came, and so I put them on paper.

The simple fact is that the work which has sustained me during the last eight years has been, for the time at any rate, accomplished. I have largely assisted to make Home Rule impossible, and now there is nothing but personal ambition to keep me in harness. If this had a sufficient

¹ He still wanted a constructive policy for Ireland, County Councils at least with a bold land policy and programme of public works. Equally he wanted Welsh Disestablishment with handsome treatment of Church en-

dowments. He desired workmen’s compensation for accidents, with some real beginning of old-age pensions. He did not feel sure that Lord Salisbury would concede enough in any respect.

BOOK

X.

1895.

object, I should be content, but, as far as I can foresee the future, there is nothing in it that justifies the sacrifices I am making.

Should I not be acting rightly if I were to close my political life at this stage and make room for Austen who has a future before him? We need not discuss this now in correspondence, but we will talk it out when you come home. And now having unburdened myself a little I will only add that all my troubles are as nothing in comparison with the happiness you have brought me.

March 1.—With Beatrice and Hilda to the Old Masters. It is an interesting but not exciting exhibition. There were some good Rembrandts, fair Turners, excellent Sir Joshuas—as well as some very poor ones—Gainsboroughs, Lawrence's "Master Lambton" which I do not like on second view, it is too affected for a child. This is a fault of all Lawrence's pictures. . . . All hope of a majority report on Old Age Pensions in my sense is destroyed. . . . I am very glad that Cannes improves with you on acquaintance. . . . I believe that I shall always think of it as a loathsome place. I am prejudiced against all places where I have been ill, or bored, or otherwise uncomfortable.

March 3.—Last night Ida and Ethel went with me to *An Ideal Husband*. There is cleverness in the piece . . . but the plot is in a false tone all through, and I wonder that Wilde did not know better than to make the black spot such an especially mean and contemptible thing as selling a political secret.

March 4.—As regards my political plans I have not made any, nor shall I make any decision; indeed I have not formed a definite opinion. Neville's communication has forced the matter again on my attention, that is all, and I leave all reflections on it till you return. . . . I think I have at last got an idea for the plot of my play,¹ but I am not certain that it would do; and have not worked it out yet. It is not so easy as I thought to make a plot which is dramatic, interesting, and, at the same time, has even an appearance of probability.

March 6.—A building Company intends to run roads from Dads Lane to King's Heath, parallel to the railway, and to put up small houses, one row to have their backs directly on to the railway and overlooking Highbury. Pleasant!—especially as I shall not be surprised if the continued

¹ He thought of writing another play. He felt he had the gift of dramatic dialogue, but soon realises that it

is the lesser part of dramatic construction.

frost has killed half the shrubs and trees. Indeed, I seem to have no luck at all just now and everything goes as crossly as possible. . . . I have at last got rid of my Old Age Report. It will be signed by Sir Herbert Maxwell, Ritchie, Hunter and Booth. Stuart has his own also signed, I believe, by five; but some of these signed Playfair's—he will thus get his majority. This really brings things back to my original expectations and I am quite satisfied, though we might have done better . . .

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

March 7.—We are beginning to get a few roses again but there has been a big interval which I must enquire into when I get to Birmingham. The violets, Deacon says, are recovering, but the frost has prevented our having any flowers and I gather that the mains are still frozen. . . . Austen has twelve lambs from six sheep, with twenty-five more to lamb. He will probably have between forty and fifty lambs this season.

His wife's answers calmed him and restrained his impulse to shake politics from his shoes. But just at this moment came the great Speaker's retirement, the open split of the Unionists in the vacant constituency, and the coincident outbreak of jeers and abuse in orthodox Tory journals and in the literary organs of the Conservative *jeunesse dorée*:

TO HIS WIFE

March 9.—To-day's *Times* says that the Speaker [Peel] is going to retire almost at once. I am sorry and do not think we are ever likely to get so good a man.

March 11.—I do not mind telling you that I should like to have you back again and think that the time has fully come when "this correspondence shall now cease" as they say in the newspapers.

March 12.—I went to Grillion's where I had a more than usually pleasant dinner. We were only six and so the conversation was general. I enjoyed myself. Lord Morley [Earl of Morley], Colonel Saunderson, Lord Welby, Sir Thomas Sanderson and Grant Duff, formed the party, and we talked of the Civil Service, the mysteries of the Treasury and the Foreign Office, and on many other non-political subjects. Grant Duff is almost as full of personal reminiscences as Sir Thomas Sanderson and they capped each other.

I am afraid we are going to have trouble in the Speaker's constituency. The Conservatives are trying to grab the seat and as they are

BOOK
X.
1895.

undoubtedly the more numerous and we have no organisation at all, they may succeed in this case. I hope, however, that Salisbury and Balfour will put their foot down. If our claim is recognised we shall run George Peel, who is anxious to stand and will make an excellent candidate.

I am afraid that Dr. Dale is dying. To-day I wrote to Mrs. Dale. . . . I see that the Baroness Burdett-Coutts is seriously ill in Paris; if you have time you might leave a card. Also the great Worth is dead. I send you an account of his life which is curious; fancy the son of a little Lincolnshire attorney leading the fashions of the world!

March 13.—I hear to-day that Dr. Dale's condition is hopeless. . . . I am much occupied with the Leamington business and do not know what the result will be. The Tories seem bent on making my position intolerable, and try to grab every seat they can possibly lay claim to. I am to have a meeting with Lord Salisbury, Balfour and the Duke to-morrow.

March 16.—Leamington gives me much anxiety. Nelson, the Conservative candidate, swears that he will go on in spite of Balfour's letter and if he does I fear we cannot win but must lose the seat to the Gladstonians. . . . What a lot of trouble and suffering there is in the world and what a dreadful new curse this influenza is! The doctors seem to know no more about it than they did at first and certainly to be no nearer a cure. . . . The daffodils and some of the azaleas are good; also some white rhododendrons. There is not a large show of orchids but some new and very pretty ones.

March 20.—Leamington is in a bad way. The Tories are as bitter as possible and determined to go on. I expect we shall lose the seat and this is really now the best that can happen. The worst would be for the Tories to gain it in spite of us. I am getting more and more sick of the whole business and I do not see how it is to improve in the future.

March 21.—I drafted a long letter to *The Times* about the present situation in Leamington and Hythe. It is really very serious and fills me with increasing disgust at the whole course of politics and an increasing wish to be out of it all.

With Mrs. Chamberlain's return at this point the letters cease. For another month the Midland quarrel raged. Would the shooting sparks kindle a national blaze?

VII

Chamberlain was scornfully moved to a staggering ultimatum by a clever and over-clever clique of literary Tories who wrote in the *New Review*. The editorship of that monthly—spirited during its short existence—had recently been taken over by no less a person than W. E. Henley. He published in the April number, 1895, an article signed “Z”. Who wrote it? Gossip pointed at first to George Wyndham, but he sent Chamberlain a letter of indignant repudiation and condemned the article as “unfounded and unfair”. The victim soon found reason to believe that the author, or inspirer, of the attack was the late Lord Curzon, then a rising light of high Toryism.

CHAP.
XLVII.
ÆT. 58.

The article implied that at any cost the Radical Unionist must be prevented from dominating the next administration. Chamberlain—goes on the thesis—has been suffered to take up a position which few or none can enjoy to the advantage of the State. A dictator at the best is a bad thing; an irresponsible dictator the worst imaginable.

There cannot be an end of this too soon . . . the Unionist party must make Mr. Chamberlain a responsible Minister at the first opportunity. . . . For no man in England is capable of better and more useful work as long as he is driven and is not on any account allowed to drive.

This lead from London gave a cue to Tory mutineers throughout the country, but especially in the Midlands.

Were Chamberlain to yield weakly at Warwick and Leamington, his political difficulties would be doubled immediately in Birmingham itself. His assailants little knew that his private circumstances had made him more than willing to quit public life before this squalid squabble sickened him of politics for the time and determined him absolutely to finish the confusion in one way or another.

Feeling he had nothing to lose, he resolved either to crush the Conservative mutiny or to leave a “stupid party” to its unaided devices. So he framed his ultimatum. Gravely he wrote to his colleague, the Whig duke:

UNIONIST DISSENSIONS—CHAMBERLAIN TO
THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE

BOOK
X.
1895.

April 19, 1895.—MY DEAR DEVONSHIRE.—. . . The difficulty has arisen unexpectedly—almost from a clear sky. It does not consist in any single incident, but in a sort of cumulative demonstration from different quarters directed against the principles of the Unionist alliance and chiefly against myself as their personal representative. . . .

I have nothing to gain by remaining in public life—I would not give a brass button to fill any office that is likely to be within my reach—and therefore, unless I can see a clear public duty or a great public object, I am ready and even desirous to be relieved of further responsibility. . . .

My rôle in the Home Rule controversy has been to keep a number of strong Liberals and Radicals staunch to the Union. To do this I have had to give evidence that I remain a Liberal at heart, although I am loyally working with the Tories. I can sacrifice a great deal in the way of opinion, but I cannot sacrifice everything without losing all the influence I now possess.

If any considerable number of Conservatives believe that they are strong enough to stand alone and can do without the Liberal “crutch”, as poor Randolph phrased it,¹ I am ready to be thrown aside and to let them try the experiment.

On the other hand, if they still want our assistance they must pay the price they have hitherto willingly paid. There is no room for further concession and they will find it bad economy to haggle over the terms of the bargain.

I believe that Lord Salisbury, Balfour and the great bulk of the party are loyally anxious to carry out the agreement—but they will have to find out some way of preventing their more undisciplined troops from firing into the backs of their allies.

If we are to help the Unionist party in the future we must have a certain latitude of interpretation, and, in carrying out our combined strategic movement, we are entitled to the same confidence as is accorded to the Conservative leaders. . . .

I hope that good may come out of evil, and that the air may be cleared after the recent thunderstorm, but if we are to avoid the most serious

¹ Lord Randolph Churchill was dead some months before. After lingering for a month, mostly in an un-

conscious condition, he passed away on January 24, 1895.

complications in the near future it seems to me that we must take up a firm stand now.

CHAP.
XLVII.
ÆT. 58.

This was the last as well as loudest clap of the thunderstorm. The air was wonderfully cleared. The Conservative leaders brought full persuasion to bear. George Peel retired in the cause of peace, but the seat remained Liberal Unionist. Alfred Lyttelton was cordially elected by both sections.

Before that event the Conservative leaders took the proper course. Arthur Balfour, at the annual meeting of the Primrose League on April 26, not only himself condemned the attacks on Chamberlain, but read a letter in the same sense from Lord Salisbury. "Never", said Balfour, "had a man met with more generous support, more unfailing assistance than he had received from the Liberal Unionist leader in the House of Commons, and never was their friendship more unclouded than at the present moment." He hoped that all troubles would soon be healed by a heartfelt union between the two sections of the party.

Lord Salisbury's letter was a decisive tribute to Chamberlain's services and powers:

Some persons seem to think that the Conservatives have ceased to be sensible of the services which have been rendered to our common cause by the Liberal Unionists and especially by Mr. Chamberlain. Such an imputation is, I am convinced, utterly without foundation. We have always recognised most gratefully the disinterested and straightforward loyalty with which Mr. Chamberlain has devoted his great authority and his splendid powers to the defence of the Union.

If he required more balm he had it from private tributes. In the *Spectator* R. H. Hutton and St. Loe Strachey had stood staunchly by him. Hutton said privately:

April 4, 1895.— . . . I look upon your present position as that of a most powerful umpire whose real weight in the State is greater even than the Duke of Devonshire's. Indeed you are the real head of the party that holds the balance. . . . I think you will hold a far greater position in history than is reserved for any member of the party which followed Mr. Gladstone into his last campaign. I should indeed begin to despair of English politics if you were to retire from the field. Pray keep the idea under as a wile of the devil's.

BOOK
X.
1895.

When the Leamington dispute was settled, Chamberlain responded handsomely to Salisbury and Balfour. He declared again publicly, what so often he had said in private, that the Conservative leaders had always met him with reason and goodwill. The occasion was a Liberal Unionist demonstration under the Duke of Devonshire's chairmanship at St. James's Hall, London, on May 22. Chamberlain said in effect that Home Rule was dead, or sick unto death. The Unionist alliance had triumphed in its original object. That it would endure and yield rich harvests was now certain. "It represents, I believe, with sufficient accuracy the Imperial instinct, and practical common sense, and the desire for rational but not revolutionary reform, which are the great characteristics of the British race. All we want now is the opportunity of appealing to the verdict of the British people." This is historic in its way, for it may be taken as the irrevocable avowal that Unionist solidarity was fully assured for all the purposes of a change of Government. At the same time—and especially with regard to better housing, compensation for accidents in industry and old-age pensions—he reiterated his advanced position on social reform.

A month later the Rosebery Cabinet fell. The Unionists were ready to replace it at any hour. Transfusion and assimilation had done their work both in the inner circles and throughout the nation. The majority of the country now welcomed and demanded, nine years after, a joint administration such as in 1886 it would have condemned as an unscrupulous connection, like the profligate liaison of Fox and North.

VIII

While the succession to Government was settled to this extent the last distractions of a torn Ministry are hard to depict. The moribund Parliament met on February 5, 1895. Vague minds surmised that it might linger out the year. This prolonged spectacle Unionists desired with cynicism, and Liberals with a hope like Mr. Micawber's that something might turn up. The situation was more like the experiences of France in the weakest years of the Third Republic during these same 'nineties

than like anything known in British politics for much more than a hundred years.

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

The Queen's Speech proposed an array of measures regarded by both sides as a mummerly. The Government professed that its appeal to democracy would be magnetic. The Opposition called the programme imbecile. The Prime Minister in the preceding months had rolled the drums against the Peers. He had proclaimed with urgent eloquence the summons to combat. Yet the subsequent hesitations and delays, the total absence of the touch of action, conveyed to the average British elector the deadly impression that Liberalism feared to engage.

Once more the cup was to be filled and the sand to be ploughed. Unionist ridicule retorted that the Government was only filling up its own cup; that it ought to abandon either the sand or the plough. The more the Liberals complained of being assaulted and insulted by privileged bravos, yet failed to show themselves men of their hands, the more the people thought that the Peers were the stouter fellows. Every item of the Newcastle programme, and above all every reappearing item, roused more derision than support. The only chance, as the Prime Minister saw, was to sink every other issue and combine in earnest against the House of Lords. The Chancellor of the Exchequer rejoiced the Peers by making Local Veto paramount. Rosebery's tragedy deepened as Harcourt's contumacy became inexorable. British democracy will forgive a party anything rather than an evident incapacity to fight when great issues are at stake. To one commentator of the time the Liberal exhibition of threatening and shrinking recalled famous lines of an unknown Elizabethan:

When I do see Achilles on the stage
Speak honour and the greatness of his mind,
Methinks I too could on a Phrygian spear
Run boldly and make tales for aftertimes.
But when we come to act it in the deed,
Death mars that bravery, and ugly thoughts
Of t'other world sit on the proudest brow,
And boasting valour loseth his red cheek.

On the Address the chief Opposition amendment, entrusted to Chamberlain's hands, challenged the Government to face the country. He put it that "Down with the House of Lords" was

BOOK
X.
1895.

a good old stock piece which never before had failed to draw. It was not taking now because "it had never before been mounted with such shabby accessories and so weak a company".¹ The Ministerial press asserted that he was below himself, the Opposition held his speech to be "one of the most masterly and incisive he had ever delivered".² The latter opinion seems the likelier judging by Hansard. Ministers themselves, he pointed out, seemed to regard a dissolution of Parliament as equivalent to the ejection of the Government. While they had forgotten how to govern, they had not learned how to resign. The longer they shrank from the cold plunge the worse would be their fate.³

On division the Ministerial majority fell to fourteen. Immediately afterwards closure of the debate was only carried by eight. Scenting disaster, Lord Rosebery wished to go out, but again was persuaded to linger. Sir Henry Fowler's celebrated success in the debate on the Indian cotton duties was a great parliamentary event, and for the mere moment suggested that the Ministerial forces might rally. But nothing availed now to turn or stem the adverse flow of public feeling. Whether Chamberlain's intervention in the London Council elections was wise, or ill-judged in his own interests as some of his well-wishers thought, the Moderate vote rose like a high tide and suggested Liberal downfall in the metropolis when the constituencies came to pronounce on the national issue.

Ministerial spirits, however depressed, had some rallies. On one occasion the Speaker's attention was solemnly called to a mystery.⁴ The Member for West Birmingham had gone into the lobby when the division on the cotton duties was called, but yet was uncounted. Where had he been? Speaker Peel's incomparable dignity heightened the humour when he remarked on the means of escape familiar to all honourable members.

A few weeks later, as already explained, Chamberlain gave substantial comfort to the Ministerialists by voting for the Second Reading of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill on April 1, when he had only a single Liberal Unionist supporter. Next their

¹ Hansard, Fourth Series, vol. xxx. 1894.
(February 15, 1895).

² *Annual Register* (1895), p. 31.

³ House of Commons, February 15,

⁴ Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Home Rule Parliament*, p. 437.

pleasure was swelled when that vote aggravated in Warwick and Leamington the Conservative mutiny, soon stamped out by his threat to leave public life. With the end of that quarrel and the final consolidation of the Unionist alliance it seemed to detached minds that the last gleams of Liberal hope were quenched for many a year.

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

IX

Having endured longer than many cool witnesses thought possible, the Parliament of 1892 had not many weeks to go. In April, on Morley's Irish Land Bill, Chamberlain attacked the Irish members in his usual tone towards them of trampling retaliation. Fairly impartial comment called his speech "masterful", though at times "unnecessarily acrimonious".¹ This in both senses is a telling remark. But he declared again for complete land purchase as against dual ownership.

At the end of April, Sir William Harcourt claimed more time for Government business. Chamberlain coined the phrase of the period. The Government were hanging on with the full knowledge in the mind of every man who sat on the Treasury Bench that they were in a minority in the country. Such a position would be "intolerable to proud men", but this was "not a proud Government".

The Budget was commonplace and seemed the flatter by comparison with its predecessor. The Welsh Bill shuffled through May into June, but few members believed that it would ever come out of Committee. More by-elections went against the luckless Ministry. Its attitude was that it longed to expire, but would neither commit suicide nor offer itself for immolation. How and when it would go to the polls or be forced to the polls was the one real public question.

The effect on the political morale of the country was seriously evil. From this phase dates a new democratic and journalistic habit of disparaging the House of Commons. Never in living recollection had the national tone been so frivolous on that subject. Far more interesting to the people were Dr. W. G. Grace's veteran triumphs at cricket in that season of 1895 and Lord Rosebery's racing luck, when with Sir Visto he won the Derby

¹ *Annual Register* (1895), p. 103.

BOOK
X.
1895.

for the second time during his short Premiership. At this, his campaign as a peer against his own House seemed somehow more unreal to the multitude in its sceptical and jocular mood. The atmosphere was deadly to zeal for temperance reform championed by Sir William Harcourt, in whose ascetic vocation the profane vulgar refused to believe. Between boredom with the Government and satire of it, the majority of England yawned and jeered.

Liveliest of the running commentaries were Chamberlain's speeches, and he never made a neater hit than in Birmingham at the end of May:

I wish I could tell you when they will make up their mind. . . . I judge a Government as I judge a man by his past life; and the Government in the past has been content to swallow so much humiliation that I doubt whether there is any chance of filling up that cup. They are in no hurry. They remind us of the criminal who was not in great haste that the show would begin, who

Now fitted the halter, now traversed the cart,
And often took leave, but was loath to depart.

. . . The other day it was stated in the House of Commons that the Government proposed to erect a statue of Oliver Cromwell in Westminster Hall. . . . What a pity it is we cannot revive Oliver Cromwell in the flesh and not only in marble. He would soon make short work of this Government. He might say to them as he said to the Long Parliament, "Get you gone: make place for men who will better fulfil their trust".¹

Next, appearing significantly at the gathering of the Conservative National Union, where he was received with great acclaim, he quoted again:

We mark the victims of prolonged excess
Bearing the burthens of unhonoured years,
Yet more reluctant as their days grow less,
To quit for unknown lands this vale of tears.²

A by-election in West Edinburgh at the end of May fore-showed the coming failure of Liberalism at the polls, but did not suggest total catastrophe.

¹ Meeting of the Grand Committee, May 28, 1895.

² London, National Union of Conservative Associations, June 14, 1895.

So the case stood when the House in June reassembled after the Whitsuntide recess. The end might come at any minute.

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

In a few days all was over. The cup of humiliation was brimmed, but it had to be drained by the Cabinet, not by the Peers. The Government, reversing itself, announced a British Protectorate in East Africa, and that as soon as possible the railway would be built from the sea to Uganda. Chamberlain nimbly produced Harcourt's former melodramatic protestation that such a policy would be both immoral and inept. Then the Irish members, to the fury of staunch Nonconformists and to the further detriment of Home Rule, compelled the Cabinet to withdraw its proposal for a statue to Cromwell. Next it was known that the Welsh Bill, which did not go far enough for Mr. Lloyd George, went too far for Gladstone. We have seen how the Bishop of St. Asaph had appealed to him on Chamberlain's suggestion. He had cancelled his pair. He might—terrifying thought—reappear to anathematise. Three days later the end came in a manner somewhat like the circumstances of a decade before, June 1885, when Mr. Gladstone's second administration foundered.

On Friday, June 21, Ministers suspected no danger. They rather anticipated panegyric of George, Duke of Cambridge,¹ than censure on themselves. It was a sultry evening. After the proper eulogies on the head of the army, for whose retirement all men were thankful, the proceedings seemed as dull as the atmosphere was close. Then Mr. Brodrick moved to censure the meritorious Secretary for War on the charge that his stores of small arms ammunition, cordite and other, were too low. Mr. Campbell-Bannerman protested that his stock was ample. When the small House, much less than half the members being present, went to a division few members attached any importance to it, but one conversation is recorded:²

BALFOUR: Well, I suppose they'll have their usual majority.

CHAMBERLAIN: Don't you be too sure about that.

The motion was carried against the Government by a majority of seven. When the Secretary for War shut up his dispatch-box

¹ Induced at last to resign his position as Commander-in-Chief.

² Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Home Rule Parliament*, pp. 471-472.

BOOK
X.
1895.

with a snap he terminated the unedifying epilogue, since Gladstone's exit, of the ten years' struggle that began with the Hawarden kite.

X

Well prepared and ready were the Unionist leaders for this or any emergency. Chamberlain "rushed home", and broke with this news into the middle of the family dinner at Prince's Gardens. "Even if they stay they must be discredited." But would they stay? Saturday was a day of doubt. The Chamberlains had been looking forward to an enjoyable week-end with Lord and Lady Rayleigh at Terling Place, where Balfour and Haldane were of the company.

There, on Sunday evening, a special messenger came to say that Lord Rosebery had resigned; that Lord Salisbury had been summoned by the Queen; that the principal Unionist leaders must meet next morning. Early on Monday, Chamberlain came to town. A meeting of four persons decided to form a Government and to dissolve as soon as possible. The details of that epoch-making discussion—it was no less—must be reserved for the next chapter.

Enough for the moment to record that in the course of the day Chamberlain, with tempting alternatives open to him, decided to become Colonial Secretary. This was a national and Imperial surprise, though it is none at all for readers of these pages who know how he had fixed his mind.

During the afternoon the resignation of Gladstone's successors was announced to a crowded House of Commons. Moving to his place with his familiar step swinging and emphatic, just as characteristic of the man as his way of speech, the Member for West Birmingham was thinly cheered by his small group still sitting on the Liberal side. No longer was he to be the greatest of back-benchers. Soon cheers in larger volume would be raised in a House of very different composition, aspect and temper. Sending for his Birmingham lieutenant, Vince, he explained why he meant to take office under a Conservative Prime Minister, and confessed some misgiving—groundless as was soon proved—about the effect upon his Radical Unionist followers, still exasperated by the local bickerings with their Conservative



TAKING THE REINS

From the cartoon by Sir John Tenniel reproduced in *Punch*, November 9, 1895,
by kind permission of the Proprietors

allies. He remarked meditatively, "It is an awkward corner to turn".

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 58.

But his own decision was unhesitating and irrevocable. All his plans now were bent towards the harmony and efficiency of the Unionist Coalition. To Arthur Balfour he wrote next day:

Tuesday, June 25.—I enclose draft of my address. Will you please say if there is anything—a passage—a sentence—or even a word—that you think had better be changed?

Balfour judged that the terse signal to West Birmingham was right as it stood. A week later, on his re-election without a contest, the House enjoyed the jest of seeing "Joe" introduced by his son Austen and the chief Conservative Whip. He had refrained from request on his son's behalf. His political happiness was cloudless when Austen was created by Lord Salisbury Civil Lord of the Admiralty.

These amenities were like Fontenoy salutes—though between allies, not enemies—on the edge of battle. The great ordeal of the General Election still lay before the new Government and both the parties. All depended in that torrid summer upon the turn of the polling. The contests were to begin in a fortnight. Far from suspecting the extent of good fortune awaiting them, the Unionist leaders were in some anxiety. The Liberals, despite the unexampled variety of their dissensions, were in no despair. At first they had hoped to keep their successors in office for some time as a Minority Ministry and to damage them before a dissolution by embarrassing supply. Lord Salisbury, for his part, was justly determined at any hazard upon an immediate General Election. The Liberal idea was impracticable. With a little wrangling, facilities for winding up parliamentary business were arranged.

After the shortest of campaigns polling was to begin in the boroughs in mid-July. Up to the night of the first returns no one imagined what a mighty overturn this election was to work. Chamberlain, with his experienced acuteness in these matters, expected—and desired—a Government majority of about 70. That would be strong enough for all efficient purposes, while easily keeping the balance of power in the hands of the Liberal Unionists. The Conservative leaders considered him too

BOOK sanguine as usual, and looked with some disquiet to a majority
X. of about 50. The Liberals anticipated rather better things—at
1895. worst a weak Unionist majority of about 30. One ex-Minister,
reputed for skilled prophecy in former years, predicted that the
result would be almost a tie.

Even Chamberlain's hardy expectations did not reach half-way to the coming event. He had on his hands a harassing squabble in Birmingham. There, up to a few days before the poll, the recalcitrant Tories, who had formerly longed to see Randolph Churchill in John Bright's old seat, now clamoured for that picturesque sailor Lord Charles Beresford; but he declined to stand. It was arranged that, though six Liberal Unionists would be accepted this time, the Conservatives should have a second member in the future. When the Edgbaston division was surrendered to them at a by-election several years later, the dour feud which had disturbed the Birmingham stronghold for over a decade was composed at last.

XI

On Saturday, July 13, the Liberal *débâcle* began. That night, sitting up at Highbury for the results as his habit was, Chamberlain's "breath was simply taken away" by the tale of Liberal disasters, and above all by the heavy fall of his friend Sir William Harcourt at Derby. That news he received with hearty regret as well as amazement. Only a few minutes before the word came "Harcourt is out" he had been asked by the American statesman, Henry Cabot Lodge, then his guest, what would happen to Harcourt, and Chamberlain replied, "Oh, his seat is absolutely safe". He saw at once that this event portended a change more extreme than he desired.

In the next days more ex-Ministers were defeated, as at Bradford and Nottingham. Then, John Morley was thrown out at Newcastle itself, in spite of the Newcastle programme, and for the moment was cut to the heart by his misfortune. Chamberlain wished that "the tide would run more slowly". In vain. Nothing stayed the Liberal catastrophe—not in Lancashire, not in London, not in Scotland, not even in Wales. Home Rule, Local Veto, Welsh Disestablishment and reform of the House

of Lords were all submerged together. Nor, when the boroughs had done their worst, was any comfort found in the counties. Liberalism was swamped even in the shires, where it had looked for its dykes to hold.

CHAP.
XLVII.
ÆT. 59.

In the end, after the three weeks' fighting, the Unionists had gained no less than ninety seats altogether, and their majority in the House of Commons was 152. It was not only the largest majority since 1832, but proved to be the most solid known since a time before the Reform Bill. On the aggregate of the national voting the Unionist advantage, it is true, was singularly small. In Great Britain, out of over five and a half millions of electors—nearly a quarter of whom did not vote and showed no interest—only about 150,000 people seem to have changed their minds in favour of Unionism since 1892. Harcourt, Morley and many other Liberals were only ousted by a few hundred votes. But yet they were ousted. Slight as was the shift of feeling in the country, it was enough to reverse the scales with a bump and to open a wholly new era in national life and affairs. Gladstone's mock-victory, only three years before, seemed a century away. While Imperialism entered upon a long period of ascendancy, the Fabian manifesto, "To your tents, O Israel", had been issued. The Labour party in these contests, though in its day of small things, had made its independent appearance on lines destined to be fatal to Liberalism when Chamberlain's career in its turn was of the past.

To detached observers the plainest thing, whether they liked it or not, was that the Gladstonian age was extinct and that a Chamberlain era had opened. The short campaign had not given him a chance to repeat the immense exertions of 1892, but in the eyes of friend and foe he was the masterful figure of the struggle. In Gladstone's absence no longer had he any rival on the popular platform. From half a dozen of his speeches—as at North Lambeth, where he appeared to support his devoted adherent, H. M. Stanley the explorer, and in the Midlands—Unionist candidates everywhere took their powder and shot. To his own constituents in West Birmingham he declared, "Neither the Conservatives nor the Liberal Unionists have been swallowed up, but we are the two wings of a greater party than ever—of a national party, to which every patriotic man may be proud to

BOOK

X.

1895.

belong—pledged on the one hand to maintain the greatness and the integrity of the Empire and equally pledged to a policy of constructive social reform”.

In Birmingham and around he conquered as never before. In his own constituency he polled this time 80 per cent of the votes against an Irish opponent. The Liberal Unionists once more had secured over seventy seats in the country and were nearly as strong as in 1886. His comment in the Highbury circle was: “The Liberal Unionist minority is big enough to prevent the Conservatives from feeling that they can stand alone”. That “it would have been a great advantage to hold the balance”, he went on with his amusing frankness to confess. But after all, the separate Conservative majority did not amount to a baker’s dozen. Liberal journals called him the “hero of the Election”. The *Standard*, which had been attacking him so recently, came right round and was now enthusiastic in his praise. *The Times* wrote:

Notwithstanding the indisputable merit of Mr. Balfour’s electioneering speeches, it may be doubted whether they possess all the qualities required for winning a hard-fought battle. . . . Mr. Chamberlain is of a different spirit. He is essentially a fighting man, an admirable master of every rhetorical weapon, with an unerring eye for every weak point in the armour of his opponent, and with a steady hand that drives the blow home to a vital point. . . . He is, as he has said himself, the best-abused man in the United Kingdom and, notwithstanding, one of the most powerful and popular.¹

XII

Two short months earlier he felt that all his luck was out, and now came this turn of the wheel. It is a passage hard to match in political biography. In the gloom of March and April, when adversities and vexations of every kind were thronging thick upon him, when even his political future seemed forbidding, he had been more than half-minded to abandon public life. In June he was Colonial Secretary, and in July, after the elections, he stood on a summit of fame and opportunity.

At Highbury, when the stream of speech-making was over, he enjoyed some days more peaceable and serene than he was to

¹ July 26, 1895.

know ever again. Showers had revived his gardens after the withering heat. In perfect weather he lived out of doors in the way he loved. Yet another phase of life was finished and yet another beginning. Inevitably, his mind went back and forward. He thought of December 1885, of the crash of all the plans and ambitions of his earlier career, when the Premiership seemed close to his reach; of the almost inescapable ruin that threatened him in a moment; of his resolve to hazard himself against all odds and fight to the death. Now his old party was undone and Gladstone a recluse. So this was how his own life was working out at last after all the perils, tumults, tragedies, the hopeless intervals. Unsatisfying to his essentially originating nature and executive aptitude had been all his victories of destructiveness in the long party war; inadequate so far the acceptance of reforming ideas by his Conservative allies. The ten years from the first Home Rule crisis to this point of Unionist greatness had often seemed in passing a sterile eternity by comparison with all he once had hoped to do and create before he was out of his fifties. Now the decade of exclusion from the Cabinet seemed a short interval after all, and just entering upon his sixtieth year he felt almost as fresh and elastic as he had been before Gladstone threw down all the dreams of his earlier life.

CHAP.
XLVII.
Æt. 59.

Chamberlain fully intended that his new office and his new career should count in the world. From Beaconsfield he never borrowed a thought or purpose. He arrived at his situations and opportunities, conceptions and plans, by processes of his own. To any kind of imitation few statesmen have been less prone. Yet by the play of circumstance, in a manner quite unlike anything else in our history, one who a decade before had been the Premier-designate of extreme Radicalism became the real heir of Disraeli, bringing far more physical vigour and executive aptitude both to the social question at home and to the Imperial affair which was world-wide. Though on the combative side of the party system he excelled superbly, he had no best pleasure in it, and when at his deadliest—to recall the epithet his contemporaries up to now thought most characteristic—he often felt isolated amidst the cheers he raised. Genius of opposition as he had proved himself against all odds, he still preferred out and out the creative spirit of his great Mayoralty

BOOK

X.

1895.

applied to national and Imperial needs. Only in administration and constructive effort was he fully himself and happy to the core. On July 23, when the General Election had gone far enough to make certain a long Unionist regime, he wrote to the Duke of Devonshire:

We have a chance now of doing something which will make this Government memorable.

Lord Morley, in conversation with the present writer, talked of his old days with Chamberlain. The discussion brought out the contrast between the man of letters and the man of action. Lady Morley interjected, "It was all politics, pure politics, he was interested in; *I* heard you". Lord Morley, then over eighty, resumed: "He (Chamberlain) had no speculative interests. With his head on one side, his eager gesture, his narrowed eye, he would discuss Herbert Spencer; but before and after such meetings the obstinate questionings did not occupy his mind. He always went away thinking of what he would do to-morrow." More than ever was it so now and henceforth; for his life had been delayed, and for lost time he meant to make up at no common rate.

END OF VOL. II

